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"Natural laws we shall never modify, embarrass us as they may; but there is still something in the nobler or less noble attitude with which we watch their fatal combinations."

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MIRAGE.

CHAPTER I.

"PARTANT POUR LA SYRIE."

HER name was Constance — Constance Varley. At that time she was probably between one and two and twenty ; a fair-haired girl, with eyes as clearly, frankly blue as the open blossom of a blue marsh-flower. Of her character and disposition it is somewhat more difficult to speak. Indeed, I am inclined to believe that in those days there was no one who had any very definite understanding of either. Miss Varley herself had perhaps thought rather more about it than is common with girls of her age ; but, on the whole, one's own self-judgment is apt to be of a vague and desultory nature, showing but little of that trenchant singleness of impression — that fine infallibility of decision — which enable us to classify the actions of our fellow-men. It has already been observed that the difficulty of judging any human being is materially increased by the slightest study of the subject.

But this was a consideration which, fortunately enough, had never occurred to any of Miss Varley's acquaintance. "Constance Varley, the dearest girl in all the world and my intimate friend, has promised to come with us. Tom is delighted. I am delighted. I am sure I need hardly ask if you are not delighted too," Mrs. Thayer had written on this occasion of their jour-

ney. "But young men are so curious nowadays. Perhaps you do not care for pretty girls any longer, Jack?" she added; and Mr. Jack Stuart, reading the letter before his club fire, had laughed and thought what an inveterate match-maker little Fanny had become. It was reported later that he had even grumbled a little over the fact to his more intimate friends; protesting that things had got to a pretty pass when a man could not even take a trip to the East without being let in for doing escort-duty to a lot of women. It was also remarked with what prompt and unanimous sympathy the complaint was received; an exhibition of feeling which certainly made it difficult to account for the abnormal alacrity and interest displayed by Mr. Stuart in his final consultations with his tailor and bootmaker on the subject of his Syrian outfit.

"I do like your cousin; I like him very much," Miss Varley had assured her friend in the privacy of her chamber that morning. "And then, you know, I had seen him before, ever so long ago — at the Farm — so that he does not seem a stranger. But I don't think he can have been quite so imposing then. At least, I don't remember those boots." And then Mrs. Thayer had grown serious again, and declared that Constance was always making the wrong people appear ridiculous. "As though I should presume to laugh at such a *jeune premier* as Mr. Stuart, Fanny; unless, indeed, I did it in self-defence merely, as a protest against being dazzled," the girl answered carelessly. And then her friend had been pacified, and kissed her, and they had gone out together arm-in-arm into the windy solitude of an Ismaïlian street.

There had been a good deal of previous discussion up at Cairo as to the length of time to be devoted to Ismaïlia. Mrs. Thayer had even waxed eloquent on the subject, bringing a long array of facts and guide-books in support of her enthusiasm; but by six o'clock that evening I fancy there was but little diversity of opinion left among them as to the interest and merits of the

desert town. For Ismaïlia is only a singularly flat place — a city built upon the levelled sand — the wide spaces and open look of its streets reminding one of a sea-bathing village: its houses running into that hopeless style of ornamentation which suggests the "villa to let." The greater part of them are but one story high, with enormous projecting roofs, from under which the windows and doors peer out with a crushed yet indomitable expression, and bear a fantastic resemblance to the face of a good man struggling with adverse circumstance. And, indeed, as Major Thayer remarked, the whole place shares in that fantastic and temporary appearance, and affects one oddly after awhile, inspiring curious doubts as to its probable duration and the advisability of sleeping there. For there was not a living creature abroad that day. As they passed along the silent streets, through the large abandoned squares, their advent seemed unnoticed and unheralded save by the fierce and steady wind; and although at first there had been a gallant effort made at merriment, it was not long before Mr. Stuart's allusions to the promised beauties of the desert town were received with melancholy resignation. By the time they reached the restaurant where dinner had been ordered, I think their leading impression was one of blank dismay.

At the café door they all paused for a moment, looking back. A fiercer gust of wind lifted a cloud of sand across the empty square. A thin despondent pariah dog limped painfully along, seeking for shelter from the blast. From the large white house across the way, bearing the inscription *Pensionnat de Demoisells*, came the feeble tinkling protest of an aged and unresisting piano.

"See Ismaïlia and die, Fanny," suggested Miss Varley wickedly.

"On the whole I think I should prefer to die first," Mrs. Thayer answered, with conviction.

But as the evening wore on the situation brightened. A long and intimate conversation with the buxom land-

lady, who began by informing them, with pardonable pride, of her fourteen years' residence *dans cet affreux désert*, and then dismissed the entire Eastern question with a slight French shrug, had had a reassuring effect upon their nerves. The discovery at the farther end of the hall of the small theatre, by the aid of which *ces messieurs* were wont to beguile their evenings, was a still stronger argument in favor of the problematic population.

"In fact, I think you might almost be justified in stating, in your journal, that Ismaïlia was inhabited at a comparatively recent period of the world's history," Major Thayer remarked to his wife. "I confess I have had my doubts."

Miss Varley was examining the stage. Miss Varley was great at private theatricals. "Indeed, I consider that quite one of my specialities," she informed Mr. Stuart in a confidential aside; "it is a pity we did not know of this place before. We might have had a rehearsal this afternoon, and astonished the natives, with a view to charity, at night. I should have liked that. And I should have liked to see their faces at home when they heard, as they would hear, that we were starring it in the provinces on our way to Palestine."

Mr. Stuart laughed, and sprang up on the platform beside her.

"It is not half a bad little theatre this," he said, approvingly.

"The very place for a play. Major Thayer!"

"Well, my dear?"

"My name is Pauline, if you please. But what is the 'Lady of Lyons' without a lover? I want a lover —"

"Why did you not ask me, then?" said Jack.

Miss Varley smiled. "I don't know about your making a good lover," she answered calmly. She looked at him critically. "You would probably move about too much on the stage. Major Thayer, now, is famous for his Claude Melnotte, but you —"

It was not the way in which Mr. Stuart was accustomed

to have his remarks received. It was a point which would bear arguing, he observed, leaning up against the side scene and looking down in Miss Varley's face. Miss Varley might at least have given him a trial, he objected — perhaps a trifle more earnestly than the occasion absolutely required.

In the pause which ensued, Mrs. Thayer made another discovery. The row of wooden boxes ranged along the wall were found, on inspection, to contain the entire dramatic wardrobe of the missing company; and half an hour later any stranger happening in — if such an event had been a possibility in Ismailia — would have been rewarded by the spectacle of two gentlemen in Louis XV. costume and powdered wigs sedately drinking their tea in friendly companionship with a somewhat dubious Spanish peasant and a young lady clad in complete bridal array.

But for this last metamorphosis it was the landlady alone who was responsible. If mademoiselle would only allow her, she had suggested, there was in her own room a costume — but a costume! Of the best! It was but even now that she had been engaged in repairing it. If mademoiselle would permit? And Miss Varley had laughed but submitted.

As she reappeared some moments later the landlady had followed her, a wreath of artificial flowers in her hand.

It was a thousand pities not to complete the toilette; and mademoiselle looked so like an angel in all that white: but what would you? It was a superstition, a *bêtise;* but mademoiselle could not have her orange-blossoms put on by the hand of an old married woman. "*Ça porte malheur,*" she said. If monsieur now would consent? Her quick eyes swept over the group and fastened with ready tact on Mr. Stuart. If mademoiselle would allow it? And Miss Varley again consented.

But as she threw off her wreath an hour later it was with some slight petulant exclamation of dismay.

"Why do you give me orange flowers with concealed

weapons in them, Mr. Stuart? You bring me bad luck," she said, and held out her hand for him to see. A few red drops were slowly trickling from a deep scratch across its soft pink palm. "You are like the Greeks — your gifts are dangerous. I shall avoid them after this," she added, laughing.

That Mr. Stuart's contrition was both sincere and eloquent in its expression could easily be gathered from the heightened color with which Miss Varley turned away; but his actual words were lost in the general good-night which followed. The two rooms provided for their party were a few steps farther down the street — large empty chambers, with doors opening directly out upon the side-walk.

"I don't think Ismaïlia has turned out so badly after all," Mrs. Thayer remarked, sitting up in bed the better to observe the slower movements of her companion. "At least, you seemed to be enjoying yourself pretty well, Constance. I wonder what Jack thinks of the way he spent his evening now?"

It was a question Miss Varley professed herself unable to answer.

"As a flirtation I think it may be said to have been a success. I do not think — no, I really do not think I can remember ever having seen any thing progressing more satisfactorily," Mrs. Thayer continued lazily from her vantage-ground among the pillows. "But whether I ought to countenance it as your chaperon —"

"Is a point you may as well decide upon to-morrow morning, dear. At least, I, for one, am going to sleep. If my flirtations — I never flirted in my life — but if my flirtations, as you choose to call them, succeed in keeping you awake, it is more than they have ever done for me," Miss Varley concluded, with a smothered yawn.

But her next action was perhaps hardly in strict accordance with the heartlessness of this speech. Indeed, as she turned her face away from the open window, its changed and softened expression was patent even to Mrs. Thayer's sleepy eyes.

"Is there any thing there to be seen? What is it, Constance?" she demanded, raising herself upon one arm. But Miss Varley had blown out the light. It was nothing. In fact, she was only looking at the night, to see if there were any stars, she answered, with some confusion. But the sky was covered with clouds again, and — "that was all," she said.

It was between six and seven o'clock the next morning when they started for Port Said. At first the steamer crosses a wide lake-like enclosure — whose waves, of a deep sea-blue, were lifting and tossing with what seemed a new and delicious freshness after the long tranquillity of the Nile voyage — and then turns suddenly aside and enters the Suez Canal, leaving behind it the billowy sand-hills of Ismaïlia, to begin a long, long, endlessly long stretch of water, with high steep banks on either hand, which only break at rare intervals and let one catch a glimpse of the vast level desert beyond. When they started, the sky was still clear overhead, but an ominous wind was tearing and scattering the cloud-masses at the horizon, ruffling the long straight strip of canal, and running along the low gray fringe of shrubs that lines the water's edge.

The little steamer moved but slowly forward. Now and then they overtook some man, standing up to his waist in the canal, sounding the depth of the encroaching sand. Once, an Arab sportsman passed them, carrying a long gun over his shoulder, his head muffled in countless folds of linen, his brown dress fluttering wildly in the wind. As they drew nearer he slowly climbed the bank, turning again to look at them, and making Miss Varley point out to her companion the singular beauty and distinctness of a figure seen against the desert sands. "It is a pity you were not with us in Egypt," she added, carelessly.

As she spoke, Mrs. Thayer rose quietly from her chair, gathered together her gloves and book and parasol, tapped her husband on the shoulder, and deliberately walked away to the farther part of the deck.

And Constance looked after her with a deprecatory smile.

"That is Fanny's little protest," she said, laughing. "You see, Major Thayer and I have simply driven poor Fanny wild by talking about the Pharaohs; and as she hated the Nile, and as she sternly disapproved of each temple and tomb and pyramid, she always flies whenever there is any symptom of our mentioning either."

"But *you* liked it, didn't you?"

"Liked what? Egypt? Well, I don't think that is quite the way I should put it. There are some things to which the word would hardly apply, you know."

"Ah, yes, I see. I suppose you must have found it rather slow at times," said Mr. Stuart, simply.

Miss Varley smiled. It was not exactly the idea she had intended to convey. "I meant — oh, what is the need of explaining things? you know what I mean. I would no more think of liking Egypt than of liking the starlight or the sea. It is one of those things which does not admit of pretty epithets. You would not think of calling a sunset pretty, you know."

"Why not? — except that I should say nothing about it in all probability. I never look at sunsets and that kind of thing unless somebody tells me to. Now you" — He hesitated, and looked at the girl rather dubiously. "My cousin Tom must be the very fellow to get along well with you, I suppose. Tom can talk poetry and all that sort of stuff by the hour when he likes."

"Oh, yes. Major Thayer and I are quite in the habit of doing that," she answered gravely. "You can have no idea, until you have heard us, what extremely poetical people we are."

Mr. Stuart laughed. But one could never tell when Miss Varley was in earnest, or when she was merely chaffing a fellow, he complained.

"That is because every thing is premeditated with me," said Constance. "Somebody told me once that I

was inscrutable. I have been endeavoring to become so ever since."

Mr. Stuart had never guessed a conundrum in his life. But still, impossible to comprehend as Miss Varley might be, he thought that with an effort —

"As though you would be likely to make an effort!"

"And why shouldn't I?"

"Oh, I don't know. Chiefly because it is not 'your nature to,' I suppose."

"I should like to know how you found that out."

"Oh, I 'm a student of character, Mr. Stuart; and I have theories: I believe in intuitions and things."

"I defy you to tell me of a single leading trait of mine," said Stuart, throwing himself back in his chair, and assuming as severely non-committal an expression as was compatible with a somewhat weak yet handsome countenance.

Miss Varley looked at him with some attention. There can be no doubt that she was distinctly impressed by the striking symmetry of his features in their enforced repose. Whether she understood their weakness it is impossible to say.

"You are the very reverse of indolent, Mr. Stuart. Indeed, I am convinced that a kind of stern devotion to an ideal of unremitting labor is as marked a trait of your character as is your love of Nature — sunsets, and all that sort of thing, you know," she added, mischievously.

They were both experiencing that slight but exhilarating form of excitement which all young and healthy-minded creatures experience in making one another's acquaintance — the delightful curiosity of the explorer into strange lands, where each familiar object derives a new charm from its unaccustomed surrounding. And, like other explorers, they began by looking for resemblances. The discovery of dissonance and limitation belongs properly to the second and later period of such studies. It is true that modern science and the Geographical Society have curiously narrowed the extent of

lands as yet unclassified. I have sometimes thought that what we have agreed to call the best society has achieved a somewhat similar result.

But this, I need hardly say, was a reflection which did not occur to Mr. Stuart. Nor do I think that either then or later did he ever make any attempt at analyzing his sensations. For the present it was certainly quite enough for him to sit beside this agreeable companion, whom chance had thrown in his way, letting himself be easily amused, and filling up the pauses between his remarks by lazily watching the motion of her fingers. Constance had remarkably pretty hands. At that particular moment they were busily employed in alternately ruffling and smoothing down the delicate tawny-colored head of a large Syrian greyhound — the last purchase before leaving Cairo. She was leaning a little back in her chair, the dog's head resting on her lap; and Mr. Stuart's eyes followed, with a certain involuntary interest, the light, firm pressure of her touch, noting, with an appreciative eye, the warm, creamy curves and shell-pink dimples in the supple hand and wrist. An absurd and unreasonable impatience of her action mixed itself up oddly enough with what he was saying.

"You will spoil that dog," he said, at last, abruptly.

Miss Varley glanced at him with some surprise.

"What — spoil Lione? Oh, no; why should I? Poor old boy! Do see what beautiful eyes he has, Mr. Stuart?" She took the dog's head in both hands, and held it up towards Jack. "Such loving, melancholy eyes! But I don't believe in them one bit, you know. People tell me that these greyhounds are wretchedly cold-hearted creatures in their way; and indeed this fellow here did not mind leaving his old master in the least. And he will follow any one — he will go to Hassan as quickly as he will come to me."

She let his head drop again, and one could almost have imagined that the dog understood her words, to see him lay a protesting paw upon her knee, and gravely thrust his cold black nose into her hand.

"What do you keep the brute for, then?" said Stuart.

"Oh, I like him. He reminds me of another dog I knew once upon a time. And then all unreasoning animals are fond of me. I don't entirely despair of winning his affections yet, you see. Don't you believe I can?"

But Mr. Stuart had moved his chair rather impatiently to one side, and spoke of something else. A moment later he glanced around again. He leaned slightly forward, and took up a string of amber beads which lay upon Miss Varley's lap.

"No, please. I can't possibly let you have my beads to play with. I never let any one touch them," said Constance, quickly, putting out her hand.

"You had these on yesterday. Do you always wear them, then?" holding the yellow string against the light.

"Always. I do not think I have been without them a day for the last three years or more. And — will you give them back to me, please?"

"I don't really see why I should," said Mr. Stuart, deliberately. "If I did, it would only be to gratify you, and you have refused to gratify *me*. You would not take my advice about that dog, you know."

"Poor old Lione!" said Miss Varley, laughing. She bent down and laid her cheek against the delicate tawny head. "As though you and I were not to be friends any more! But we are above being dictated to in that fashion, are we not, Lione?"

"Here, Lione! Come here, sir!" said Mr. Stuart, sharply.

The dog started, pricked up his ears, hesitated for a moment, and then walked deliberately over to Jack.

"That is what Lione thinks about it. You see that I am generous enough to refrain from any comment," said that gentleman, with a triumphant smile.

Miss Varley leaned languidly back in her chair. It was a lesson not to count upon people — not even upon dogs, she said, and folded her hands meekly together. But the meekness was somewhat out of harmony with

the expression of her eyes a moment later. "For a member of the Society for the Promotion of Cruelty to Animals, I am glad to observe that your instincts are rather better than your principles," she said, and looked meaningly at the fingers absently playing with Lione's collar.

Mr. Stuart drew back his hand and looked extremely foolish. But it was an altogether different affair, he explained. There was no resemblance between that weak indulgence of a dog's worst susceptibilities, which Miss Varley was fostering, and the kindly yet authoritative touch of a master. It was only proper some acknowledgment should be made of the animal's prompt and commendable recognition of masculine superiority, he said.

And in the half-serious discussion which followed, Lione's claims to attention faded entirely away, until — like many another blameless individual — he found himself of not the slightest interest to the very advocate who was pleading his case. It was perhaps with a fortunate philosophy that he accepted the situation, and laid himself down to sleep at Mr. Stuart's feet. For human biography must, from a dog's point of view, be chiefly characterized by a consistent lack of logic. And much of what followed was strictly biographical. Whatever reason Mr. Stuart might have had for listening with a certain pleasure to those details of Miss Varley's home life, those descriptions of her father and stepmother, those anecdotes about "the boys," Lione would undoubtedly have heard them with the most disinterested indifference.

Of Jack's past history I fancy there was something more to tell; and yet, broadly speaking, it could be reduced to the common-place college experience of an ordinary young man. And following fast upon those years of hearty enjoyment and involuntary study, came years of work — Mr. Stuart was in his father's bank — in which the same liberal hand seemed to preside over the proportion of enjoyment to labor. Altogether, a

life flowing smoothly and cheerfully along a well-cut channel; a healthy, pleasant, harmless — if not a picturesque — existence.

Once only in the course of that morning the little steamer stopped. It was at a small and dingy inn, built close upon the water's edge, with a rickety wooden piazza running around its front, and a poor attempt at a garden on one side. A wretched little garden it was, full of great boxes of earth, in which a few feeble geraniums and some sickly-looking verbena-plants were vainly struggling for subsistence. And there was something of this same suggestion of useless effort in every thing about the place — in the loose and slouching figure of the man who waited on the steps to receive such scanty orders for food as the travellers might give; in the gaunt mistrustful dogs, creeping warily in and out among the tables; in the pale and hollow-eyed little woman, whose eager, sallow face was lighting up with unfamiliar smiles in answer to Miss Varley's questions.

For, "Are those your own children?" that young lady was asking in her gentlest voice. "You must find it very difficult to keep them so wonderfully neat and clean. But what a nice place you have got for them to play in here, and how pleasant it must be for them to sit in the shade and see the ships go by."

"They will be getting wilder, more like savages, every year. Tony! come here this moment and speak to mademoiselle when she is good enough to notice you. But they will not come when you call them. It is of no use," the mother said in her complaining, peremptory voice. "They are savages."

"They are dear little children, I think," said Constance, looking up with friendly eyes. "And I am sure I have something here in my bag that Tony would be glad to see, if he would only come here for a moment." She held out her hand, and the child crept shyly nearer, hiding his face in his arm, and glancing at her furtively from behind the shelter of each table-leg and chair, until

at last he gained courage to put his small brown fingers into hers.

And Jack looked on with an approving smile.

They were dirty little beggars, those children; and as for the girl, Mr. Stuart had never seen such a terrible squint in his life. But then it always looked well to see a woman take to a child — any child. It was the proper feminine thing to do. And if there was a thing which Mr. Stuart abhorred —. "As for myself I quite dislike children, I assure you," said Constance, looking calmly up. "I have two little half-brothers of my own, you know, and I find them very disagreeable in a general way. Of course that does not prevent one's being kind to the poor little wretches when one has a chance; but still —"

"I wish you would not say such things about yourself. With me, of course, it is different; but if anybody else should hear you make such a speech — I should not like it at all," said Jack, very decidedly.

And so the afternoon wore on. As the hours passed the day grew darker, there were even a few drops of rain, and then — the wind rising once more and tearing the low-lying mists asunder — a brilliant burst of sunshine, which turned to reddish gold the shining rosy breasts of a flock of pink flamingoes rising from out the marsh. It was the last bit of color in the day. An hour later a violent storm of rain and wind was blotting out the uncertain outline of the town. Even before they left the steamer they could already hear that dull booming sound of the surf upon the shore, which in after days became a part of all their impressions of Port Said.

The ladies were both tired that night, Miss Varley especially so, and shortly after dinner they had gone to their rooms. But an hour or so later, passing along the corridor, Mr. Stuart came suddenly upon a lighted candle flaring wildly in the draught, and heard a voice inviting him to come outside upon the terrace and listen to the waves.

The rain had ceased. A fresh wet wind was blowing

steadily, strongly in, bringing with it the chill salty smell, the monotonous roar of the turbulent seething sea.

"We shall have a rough passage to-morrow," the young man said, looking up at the inky blackness of the sky.

Miss Varley did not answer. She was crouching against the balustrade, wrapped in some thick white cloak. Her hair was blown back from her face, her cheeks were pale, her eyelids heavy, with the fierce caresses of the wind. As they entered the lighted hall again Mr. Stuart was struck by the singular abstracted look of her lips and eyes.

"There is not a star to be seen," she said absently, glancing up as he closed and bolted the door. "Ever since you joined us — do you know this is the third successive night there has not been a star? I hope it is not an evil omen."

CHAPTER II.

SHOWING HOW THEY WENT UP TO THE TEMPLE.

AND perhaps Miss Varley was right. Perhaps there *was* some occult influence at work. It certainly looked like it the morning they came in sight of Jaffa — a still gray morning, broken by brief sharp intervals of pattering rain. A morning made even more monotonous by the slow regular grinding of the waves against the beach; made even more disconsolate by the captain's hesitation as to whether they could ever get ashore.

For the harbor of Jaffa is a mere convention — an accident of wind and tide. A long scattered reef of rock, the *débris* of the ancient city, reaches across from side to side, broken only by two narrow clefts through which it is just possible for boats to pass; while all

about, a line of leaping water, a cloud of high-tossed spray, flashes and breaks beneath the overhanging town. For Jaffa is a city set upon a hill, a storm-bound, sea-girt city, blanched and worn, and beaten by the wind; the oldest city in the world, gray, heaped, defiant, setting its steadfast face against the sea.

And clinging to its steps, thronging its dark and tortuous lanes, what strange, what multicolored life is there! Now elbowed off the slippery stepping-stones by some wild Russian pilgrim, his worldly goods slung in a cumbrous roll across his back; now crushed against some contemplative Turk smoking in his doorway by that long string of heavy-laden camels, advancing with the calm consciousness of size; again, compelled to wade through a pool of water to avoid this row of pushing, imperturbable donkeys; knocked about by the natives, shoved aside by every porter, apostrophized in every Eastern tongue; splashed, muddied to the eyes.

"Did not some one write a book on the 'Pleasures of Eastern Travel?'" asked Mrs. Thayer resignedly, as they passed out from under the last crumbling and grass-fringed archway.

A long wide common in the condition of a ploughed field after an inundation — made picturesque with domes of snowy canvas, made dreary with the mournful line of Cook tourists, each seated in his own mud-puddle at the door of his own tent — and they had reached a lovely country lane winding up the side of a hill between two gray-green rows of prickly-pear. Past these a sea of orchards, bending, and fragrant, and golden with orange-trees. The noise and jar of the city fell away from them as in a dream; the sky was all blue and tremulous after the rain; a weak soft wind came wandering across the fields, bringing with it the sweet breath of a world in flower; and, for the first time, Miss Varley realized that this was springtime — and springtime in Syria.

And, as the hours passed, this impression only deep-

ened. It was yet early in the afternoon as they rode out of the Jerusalem Gate. A delicate and evanescent sunshine flickered and played about the day. The birds were singing in every hedgerow, a warm and fitful wind dashed in their faces as they cantered on. Looking for miles and miles away, there was no tree, no house, no village to be seen. Only the silence of satisfaction brooded above these flower-crested fields, across whose billowy sweep the lavish spring broke in a sea of life, of color, and of bloom.

And they rode on and on. The sun sank lower on the horizon, the pale sky whitened, grew more ethereal in the east; the pallid cacti crowded once more along the narrowing path, until, at last, lifting from out the gray and gleaming shadow of an olive-grove, they saw the tower of Ramleh reddening in the sun.

Now, having once asserted that Mrs. Thayer, though a small, was yet a perfect, example of the typical American woman, it is perhaps superfluous to add that Mrs. Thayer was always tired. Indeed, a sensation of lively fatigue might be said to represent her normal experience of life. "I am afraid I have been tiring you. Won't you sit down and rest a moment, Fanny?" the Major was reported as having said to her one evening at a ball. It was in the early days of their engagement, and Miss Fanny smiled rapturously at him in return. "Oh, thanks! But it isn't of any consequence — really. I have been tired ever since I was ten years old, you see," she explained, complacently. And a longer acquaintance had only induced her husband to accept the statement as a fact.

Mrs. Thayer was one of those women whom it is very safe to praise. As a girl, Miss Morgan had been a general favorite; as a married woman, Mrs. Thayer was universally popular. From her cradle to her marriage, the same exhibition of pretty smiling indifference had won her the same tribute and applause. The same quality of tact had obtained an identical result. From the days of lollipops to those of lovers, Fanny Thayer

had never offended a single human being — her very success was veiled, and quiet, and endurable.

She was a little woman with many principles, absolutely no passions, and very little digestion. A charmingly pretty little woman, with a placid, affectionate disposition. She was good-natured, clear-voiced, scrupulously truthful in words, devoted to the Anglican Church, novel reading, old silver, and to Major Thayer. She was both well-informed and intelligent, making it a rule to read every new book praised either in the "Nation" or the "Atlantic Monthly." She believed in "culture," but was also anxious to possess a "liberal mind," for which purpose she eschewed modern furniture, affected gowns of a peculiar make, and read Matthew Arnold — whom as a poet she secretly considered to be far below Coventry Patmore — and she was not incapable of literary self-denial. When it became a social duty in Boston, she was among the first to read and "analyze" the works of Turgenieff. But the novels in which her very soul delighted were those of "Ouida."

In age, she was about seven or eight and twenty — in appearance, some four or five years younger — a delicate, thin little woman, with small regular features, very red lips, and an appealing infantine smile. Her favorite amusement — the one which called for all her skill and tact and power of pleasing, the one containing too a strong delicious thrill of vicarious excitement — was match-making. I have already stated that Miss Varley was her favorite friend. It is even possible that these last two considerations had had their share in suggesting this Syrian journey. Certainly any other solution of Mrs. Thayer's sudden fancy for Eastern research seemed an inadequate motive, viewed in the light of her injured incredulity when brought face to face with the ruined arches, the silent courts of Ramleh.

"A tower? Another tower to climb when I have been riding — absolutely *riding* — for hours? Oh, Tom, this is really not considerate."

"Poor Fanny! But you are right. Climbing was distinctly not in the bond," said Constance gaily.

"It 's a bore, of course. Seeing places is always a nuisance. But I think you will find it rather mortifying later on if you have not done it, Fanny. Why, even Cook's tourists do Ramleh, you know," suggested Mr. Stuart.

"Very fine look-out by top, lady. Him not high tower," added the ubiquitous Hassan.

But Mrs. Thayer only shook her head with a mild obstinacy peculiarly her own. It was really a matter of duty, she remarked gently — it was her *duty* to abstain from all superfluous exertion. It was of course difficult for people in robust health, like Constance, for instance, to appreciate the effort she had been making all day. It was the most natural thing in the world that Tom —

"Poor little woman! But indeed I was afraid all along it would be too much for you," Tom interrupted her, with great contrition.

And then there was a general consultation, which ended in Mrs. Thayer being put in her saddle once more, while her husband walked along by her side. She would not hear of the others following. It would be really too bad if they all had to miss the view merely on her account. Mr. Stuart would certainly not object to taking care of Constance? Mr. Stuart professed himself delighted.

They went up. The latest shadows of late afternoon were creeping across the plain, but the far-off line of sea was still shining in the sun, and a pale golden light floated above the orange gardens of Jaffa. They leaned out over the crumbling parapet together. From far below rose up the clear shrill laughter of some children playing among the tombs. Two large brown birds started from their nest half-way down the tower, and sailed slowly past without a motion of their wings. Constance leaned farther out, and watched them lose themselves in that wide sea of space. She made a pretty picture standing there — her face all rosy with pleasure and

exercise, and in her eyes, and on her lips, a smile. The gray old stones behind her brought out in strong relief the delicate blonde coloring of her face and hair. The tightly-fitting habit did perfect justice to each graceful supple pose of the rounded figure. Mr. Stuart looked at her with simple admiration. Nothing half so charming, the young man thought, had ever come into his way before.

And perhaps this conviction may have become somewhat too apparent in the fixity and eagerness of his glance. It is certain that, before many moments had passed, some slight self-consciousness crept into Miss Varley's attitude. The color deepened a little in her cheeks; an almost imperceptible rigidity tightened the muscles of her mouth; there was a certain embarrassment in the fluttering movement of the hands that trifled with her whip.

"I think this tower is charming. I delight in towers," she said, abruptly. "There is something glorious in this sense of height, of being lifted above the world — out of life, as it were. It makes all little things seem so petty. I don't wonder Saint Simon Stylites was canonized. I believe that living alone and on an elevation would even make a saint of me."

"You don't get dizzy then?" said Jack, conversationally. "Some people do, you know. There was a man in my class at Harvard; that is, he would have been in my class, only old Davies — the mathematical examiner I was telling you about, you know — he conditioned him when he came up for his last go at it; gave him another year, in fact, which was a great shame when you consider —"

"The moon! Mr. Stuart, I see the moon. 'Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon; and thou, Moon, in the Valley of Ajalon!' Don't you remember? And there it is." She lifted up her hand and pointed to a pale vaporous disk, the mere ghost of a moon, hanging far off above the darkling hills. "How wonderful — how wonderful it is!"

"Some one told me a good conundrum about that the other day. Wish I could remember it. Something about Joshua. 'Why was the prophet Joshua a —' No; that isn't it. 'When was the moon — '"

Miss Varley started, and looked up apologetically. It was very stupid of her, but she had dropped her whip, her favorite whip. Had they not better go down and look for it? she suggested innocently.

To reach camp they passed through the Turkish graveyard. The last glow of the sunset was reddening all the quaint and narrow stones; a mass of flaunting anemones covered each grave, the blood-red color bursting like flames from out each crevice in the wall; and a troop of Syrian children were pursuing each other, with cries of wild, shrill joy, along the path. But, as these two young people rode on, the sun sank suddenly below the horizon; a sharp chill ran like a shiver through the air; and from between the swaying cypress-trees there came a group of women, white-robed, and veiled, and silent as the dead. It was a wonderful bit of effect — the wilderness of wan, gray stones, the sudden silence, the spectral, shrouded figures among those funereal trees. It was an accident, of course. A mere suggestion. Something which made Constance remember the far-off mystery of that shadowy moon. And still the women stood there motionless; their long loose garments waving in the rising wind — "quite like a transformation-scene in a first-class London pantomime," Mr. Stuart suggested cheerfully.

But Mrs. Thayer looked anxiously into her friend's face, as they cantered up to the door of the largest tent a moment later. "Surely you haven't been quarrelling with Jack, dear child," she asked with genuine concern.

"What an idea!"

"Well, I don't know," doubtfully; "I thought you were looking rather vexed."

"It would be difficult to be vexed with Mr. Stuart," Miss Varley answered dryly. "Mr. Stuart was most amiable, certainly. He saw something which reminded

him of a conjuring effect. He has been telling me all about it — about Maskelyne and Cooke — their principal tricks, you know, ever since we left Ramleh." And then, in answer to the puzzled look which still cast its shade upon Mrs. Thayer's countenance, "You dear little goose," she said lightly, resting her hands upon Fanny's shoulders and looking affectionately into her face, "why don't you cultivate a little Eastern hospitality instead of standing there and criticising me? Or is this intended for a base modern imitation of Abraham entertaining the angel in the doorway of his tent?"

They went in. These Syrian tents are luxurious resting-places in their way. "It reminds me of a painted tomb, don't you know. One of those Theban tombs, I mean," said Major Thayer, looking around at the brilliant and fantastic red, and blue, and white, and yellow decorations of his canvas walls. "I think it simply enchanting," said Fanny, enthusiastically, from the depths of the easiest chair. "So picturesque! give me that footstool, Jack; so gipsy-like — and the cushion. Thanks. I never could understand why soldiers make such a fuss about roughing it. I suppose they can't help it though, being men." — "Him very good when him dry, lady," suggested Paolo, darkly. But it was only the waiter speaking. The prophetic murmur passed unheard.

The next morning the sun was still low in the east as Constance threw open the curtains of her tent. Before her lay a white and shining world, all glistening with dew. Early as it was, the camp was already in movement; a thin blue smoke curled up from between the olive-trees, a group of muleteers were taking their coffee before the fire. As she crossed the field towards the picketed horses, a weird chorus of welcome rose from beside the road, — a sound which made her start, and drop her flowers, and then walk hastily back to the shelter of the tents. For she had come upon a ghastly sight, a circle of Syrian lepers hanging about the outskirts of the camp, pale, crippled shapes, whose hollow

cries for alms rang like a mockery through the clean new gladness of the day.

"Poor things! I am not quite sure if it is right to pity them, though. Being in the Bible, and all that, makes such a difference. And any thing so exceptionally horrible must be accepted as the manifest working of Providence, of course," Fanny remarked, looking mournfully about the breakfast-table as she spoke.

"As though Providence —"

"Now don't, Tom; don't, there 's a dear! Don't be profane. It is such *mauvais genre.* And when you think we shall see Jerusalem to-day! Why it 's like a pilgrimage, something. — Oh, that milk! Constance, look at that milk, will you? And after all that I 've said. Really, Tom, I wish you would speak to Hassan yourself about it. There are some things in life that can't be borne, you know," said Mrs. Thayer.

The day was cloudless. The lines of the hills were soft; they seemed to lead the soul away into a dream of peace. This Syrian scenery moves one with a strange emotion. Is it religion? is it the lingering superstition of childhood — the faint persuasive vision of far-off days? For the one supreme goodness of the world's history has left a crowning grace on field and sky; the peace which passeth all understanding broods over these sunlit spaces; there is the shadow of a Presence among those far blue hills. It was late in the afternoon before the travellers reached the level road again. For hours the path had climbed higher and higher through thin, pale olive-groves, past crumbling ruin and wall, higher and higher among the pale and desolate hills. And it was evening when they saw Jerusalem. Its gray wall, its towers and domes, lay before them. They had just made the last ascent of the road, and taken a last turn, when, suddenly, the city of great renown — small, gray, impressive — was there. Pilgrim and Crusader had been here before them. For centuries that narrow road had been pressed by hastening, weary feet; the eyes of countless thousands had strained to see that spot; and

with what thoughts, with what deep reverence, what wonder, what awe, begotten by no other city of this great world! Classic Rome, marvellous Athens, radiant Paris, or mighty London — could they quicken and still the sense of all that is momentous and unanswerable, like this gray Judean fortress, this old stronghold of religion, this shrine and this tomb?

They were a motley crowd of wayfarers upon the narrow pass that day. Strange pilgrims, footsore and ardent; strange pilgrims from the steppes of Russia, and from the naked hills of Spain; pilgrims from north and south, and east and west — spell-bound, and awe-struck, and dumb!

And then, in the gray hush of that colorless twilight, they all moved on together to where the best blood of the great mediæval ages has thronged; to where the best thought of all ages has turned; to the gate whence came forth the Jews and Gentiles who had known, heard, seen, and — crucified Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER III.

A CASE OF PHOTOGRAPHS.

ONE day they rode to Bethany. The path wound about the foot of the Mount of Olives, and then up a steep and stony defile. As they rode on they looked down into valleys and out across the rounded slopes of barren hills, all gray with stones and dark with olive-trees, to where a line of more luxuriant green followed the tortuous Jordan in its course, and the Dead Sea water lay all blue and shining in the light. It was a warm and windless afternoon, and the gray old world seemed sleeping in the springtime sun. Every thing was full of an ineffable sense of repose, of peace, and long unbroken silences.

Bethany itself is a small gray village, built of stone — a dozen houses walled about and made secure against the Bedaween raids. At the sound of the clattering hoofs, a troop of pretty, ragged children came swarming out of every hut — an eager, laughing, light-footed band — pushing about the horses' feet, offering for sale wild masses of weeds dragged from the nearest bank, crying, gesticulating, appealing: a sudden whirl of noise, and life, and color. They saw the house of Lazarus; they clambered down a steep and broken flight of stairs into the small, dark opening of the rock-hewn tomb; they gathered wild-flowers by the door; they feed the guardian, they feed the children, they feed some ancient women who were waiting on the road; and then they stood and looked at each other with that blank, serious, somewhat embarrassed expression not unfamiliar to travellers upon consecrated ground. Nothing is more perturbing than the absence of an expected emotion.

It was along the upper road that they returned to the city. The stone-strewn fields were full of blossoming almond-trees, a miracle of grace and color among the naked hills encompassing Jerusalem. There was even a certain pathos in the mingling of this frail and exquisite beauty with the bleak sternness of the landscape — it was like the tenderness of Christ crowning and transfiguring the stern and rigid forms of the old Jewish faith. And as the twilight fell about them, the rose-tinted bloom of the trees seemed to deepen in color, a faint pink flush glowed along every rocky steep — an effect inconceivably lovely as seen against that background of gray sky, gray hills, and gray and ghostly graves. For they had passed the Garden of Gethsemane — a small, silent enclosure, made shadowy with olive-trees, made sweet and bright with common cottage flowers: the faint clinging smell of lavender, keen-scented thyme, or rosemary, could always bring that moment back to Constance. They had left the garden behind them, and had entered the shadow of the city walls, down in that silent valley where the dead lie

thick and close, a solemn line of sentinels guarding the City of the Grave. And as they checked their horses at the gate the last red color faded from the sky; high overhead the pale new moon was floating in a sea of silvery mist.

"And that was not a bad idea; not a bad idea by any means," remarked Mr. Stuart approvingly, as he helped Mrs. Thayer to dismount before the tents beyond the Jaffa gate.

"You like Bethany, lady? Very nice place. Some day you go there, stay all day. Take your Bible and your lunch with you, and make his picture," suggested Hassan, cheerfully.

"Oh, I shall certainly go there repeatedly. I think it is quite the ideal distance for a ride," Mrs. Thayer concluded.

But in fact they never saw the place again. That night the weather broke. The steady beating of the rain wakened Miss Varley more than once, and there was a certain fascination in the sound; a singular exultation in listening to the gusty wailing of the tempest held at bay beyond those canvas walls. It was perhaps rather more singular than agreeable seen by the dull gray light of morning. Mrs. Thayer certainly found it so. By midday she had traversed every shade of feeling comprised between an amiable resignation to the inevitable, and a gentle but immovable determination to avoid it. By one o'clock they had struck camp, and half an hour later were safely under cover again — but this time at the Damascus Hotel.

It is a curious old house in its way. "A capital subject to sketch. I should call it a 'Study for a Staircase,' myself," the Major remarked. A quaint confusion of small stone platforms and narrow stairs, where each room opens out upon a different plane, and the safe crossing of the various terraces becomes a cause for congratulation in wet weather; but it was a comfortable old place as well, and one which Mrs. Thayer showed but little inclination to abandon.

"For if I never can take the slightest interest in any thing unless I am both warm and dry, and if the stones hurt my feet, and the camels tread upon me — well, *look* as though they were going to tread upon me, then — and if I hate Jews, what is the use of my going out in this weather, Tom dear? And then you and Constance always see so much more than I do. It 's really a waste of energy for me to go myself."

"*J'aime mieux le croire que d'y aller voir.* But unless you are careful you will see Jerusalem with the eye of faith and with that eye alone," Miss Varley answered her on one occasion.

"I like that, when I am the only one, positively the only one of you, who keeps a journal! But you can't expect me to see things and write about them too, and I have filled in every thing up to yesterday, Constance. Suppose you tell me what you have seen to-day? To reward you, I will make you a cup of tea. You must be half-frozen, poor child! I declare it makes me shiver even to look out at such weather."

"Oh, it is not raining now. Tom says the weather is clearing up. The clouds are blowing all away to seaward," said Miss Varley, carelessly, walking over to the window as she spoke. "But, O Fanny, you ought to have seen the sunset from the roof of the Armenian Convent! We have been up there for the last hour or more, exploring; going into chapels, and out upon terraces, and under archways, and across wide empty courts — a place as confused as a dream. When we had lost ourselves for the third or fourth time we climbed a last staircase, and came suddenly out upon a crowd of Greek pilgrims, women and girls, all dressed in white, with beautiful, sad faces — such faces, Fanny! — and still, dark eyes. There must have been a hundred of them at least, sitting in groups along the parapet, waiting for some service to begin; and behind them such a sunset — a great, shining sky of gold. It was like —" She hesitated. "It was like my child-idea of heaven, I think."

"Ah, yes."

Mrs. Thayer poked the fire, drew her furs closer about her, and leaned more luxuriously back in her chair. "Well, go on; and before that?"

"Oh, we had merely been wandering about, looking for a walk. Down the Via Dolorosa, by the house of Pilate, through the bazaars. You know how I delight in these old streets. Somehow it seems a perfect revelation to me that Jerusalem should be *picturesque*. And we have been in wonderful places — sombre and arched and vaulted passages; ways where the light cut through the shadows like —"

"Like the pavement through one's boots?"

"Well — admitted!" laughing; "but then I console myself for that by looking on these stones as on the very 'rocks of offence — for a gin and for a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem.' But never mind that. After awhile we found ourselves in that sunken courtyard before the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. It was late, and the place was almost empty; no image-sellers; not more than a dozen bead-merchants; not even a —"

"Then Tom did not get my rosary, after all?"

"Tom was not there."

"I beg your pardon. I thought you said you *both* —"

"I meant Mr. Stuart and myself," said Constance.

"Ah, yes. I see."

A pause.

"And was it with Tom or with Jack that you went to your heavenly convent, then?"

"With Mr. Stuart. Why?"

"Oh — nothing. I merely ask for information's sake, you know."

Miss Varley was silent for a moment. When she next spoke it was with a somewhat quickened voice, with somewhat heightened color on her cheek. "As far as that goes, Mr. Stuart and I have been alone nearly all the afternoon. Tom left us at the first bazaar. I had not the slightest idea that you would mind our going on without him, and so — Why, Fanny, it was for you —

for your crosses — that Tom went. He said you told him — "

Mrs. Thayer smiled — a peculiar smile. "Well! It is of no great consequence, fortunately. There is really no one we need care for here; and, at the very worst, they could only mistake you and Jack for — " She checked herself with a suggestive laugh. "Well, and afterwards? For you really have told me nothing for the journal yet."

"But Mr. Stuart — "

"I positively can't put him in again; nor the weather. Tom insisted last night my journal read like a meteorological report of Jack's proceedings already," said Fanny, plaintively. And Miss Varley went on with her story. It had been late in the day when the two had wandered into the church. Coming out of the cheerless afternoon into that close, warm, silent darkness, they had groped their way along — lured by the sound of distant music — until they reached the Russian portion of the edifice. Some brilliant and peculiar service was being performed. From three to four hundred pilgrims knelt upon the ground, each with a lighted taper in his hand; incense was pulsing out in clouds of pale blue smoke; the sound of music poured from out the chapel-door; the myriad candles rose and fell in flickering lines of flame, as their bearers stood or knelt to the mournful chanting of the priests. It was a wonderful, magical effect.

Standing aside, and in the shadow, Miss Varley watched the crowd stream down the chapel-steps — a long procession of figures — men, women, children, clad in strange garments, in cumbrous furs, all speaking of the North. And in each hand there was a sacred light; and on each face there shone a wild and fervent faith.

"They were peasant-faces," she said; "dull faces, deadened by poverty, grown old and hard in dreary acceptance of privation and pain. But, as we stood there, I thought of what that moment was to them; I thought of the place this pilgrimage would hold in their memory — the one poem, the one emotion, the supreme

flowering of all those barren years of toil; I looked at the uncouth, misshapen feet, at the poor rough hands deformed by daily drudgery; I thought of all the steps that had been taken, of all the weary days and nights those men had wandered on — poor human things, ignorant, superstitious, despised — thousands upon thousands of them crossing the bitter steppes of Russia, the swollen rivers, the dreaded unfamiliar sea; giving up country, home, life even, to stand upon the spot where One has stood to whom all men were equal, all sorrow was sacred, all suffering was familiar. They were only a handful of Russian peasants; but, Fanny, I looked at them and I thought of the way in which *we* entered Jerusalem, and it made me — oh, it made me ashamed to be alive!"

She had risen and gone to the window again — a tall slim figure, seen against the twilight gray — the light lingering a little upon her clasped white hands, upon the pure and earnest face. There was a moment's silence in the room, and then Mrs. Thayer moved uneasily, and coughed a little dry cough, and spoke.

"I think we ought to be upon our guard against being too much taken by these foreign ceremonies, Constance. You know what dear old Dr. Adams used to say: 'If the Catholic Church could only be clearly separated —'"

"It is not that! It is not — Oh, Fanny, can't you understand? It is not that they are Catholics or Greeks; it is not that they belong to any one Church; it is the faith — the belief — the spirit of it all! Some of them have been a year upon the way. Think of what that means — a year. And they are coming always — thousands of them. Coming from north and south; people of different race, of different nature, of different life; and all coming *here*, and all moved by one common impulse of adoration, by one common sorrow, by one great common need of hope, and pity, and love."

She crossed the room quickly and knelt down beside

Fanny's chair. "It is like finding a new horizon. It makes all life seem larger — one's own life smaller," she said.

But Mrs. Thayer only looked at her with gentle wonder. "I don't think I care particularly about discussing such subjects myself. I always think they have all been settled for us by people who knew much more about it than we possibly can," she said, with all the mild conviction of a woman who never missed attending church except in the severest weather, and wore "appropriate" bonnets in Lent. And then, after a moment's pause: "Jack is quite right. I never saw any one look so well in a heavy cloak as you do, Constance. I think it suits your figure, you know," she added cheerfully.

But Miss Varley did not answer. The last gleam faded from off the gray old city at her feet; here and there some jewel-like spot of flame began to shine through the gray monotony of twilight; it was all so still that she could even hear the slow dropping of the rain from off the eaves. The gray clouds drifted slowly to the sea, she pressed her forehead wearily against the window-pane, and her thoughts followed them out with a familiar longing, — a new and passionate regret.

Conversation at *table d'hôte* that night went on very much in the usual way.

"Cook tourists? oh, dear me, no! Only fancy, Maggie, this gentleman thought we belonged to Cook!" said a thin, dark-haired, and vivacious young lady of some five-and-thirty years to a stolid English maiden sitting by her side. And the young person addressed as Maggie, looked up with a fine disdain. "We are travelling under the escort of Mr. Gaze. We are a select party. And Gaze is very genteel," she remarked calmly.

"Ah, I see. It must be very pleasant to be select," said Major Thayer, gently. "I am afraid I should find it rather trying myself, particularly with my plebeian

tastes, for *I* delight in Cook. I envy all the 'personally-conducted' people I meet. And I found a prophecy about them the other day — it is in Isaiah: 'For the multitude of thy strangers shall be like small dust, and the multitude of terrible ones shall be as chaff that passeth away.' Rather neat, I thought, considering."

"My *dear* Tom!" from Mrs. Thayer, in parenthesis.

And at that, old Mr. McMoon — the same elderly, smoke-dried, gray-haired Scotchman whom they had met at Jaffa: the man Miss Varley had nicknamed "Lunar Caustic" — old Mr. McMoon then looked up with something of a twinkle in his dull gray eyes. "You have no heard my story yet, I 'm thinking," he said, speaking with great deliberation. "I was a Cookite myself in the beginning — we have all been monkeys once, you know — but I left them at the second camp. 'Will ye no come and join us at our friendly chants this evening, Mr. McMoon!' says the head man to me. 'It is our custom here to praise the Lord with pipe and tabor as we move along towards Zion,' says he. 'As we go where?' says I. 'Towards Zion; towards the Heavenly City,' says he, getting rather red in the face. 'Very sorry, but I'm afraid there has been some mistake. I 'll complain about it at the office when I get back, for I see my ticket has only been made out for *this* world,' I said. And the next morning I left them."

Mrs. Thayer and Constance exchanged glances. "You don't really expect us to believe that?" said Miss Varley, laughing.

"It 's a fact, my dear madam, I do assure you. And there was another young fellow there — a harmless, feckless sort of laddie — who went about in hunting trim; so they gave him the pick of the horses when we left Jaffa. 'And why don't you come on and try a wee bit canter, then?' I asked him when we had been riding for a mile or two. 'Oh Mr. McMoon,' said he, 'some one has been meddling with my boots, and I 've lost one spur, and I don't like to touch him up with the

other,' said he. 'Why, man alive,' said I, 'just you make one side of your horse canter, and never fash yourself but the other side will follow fast enough,' I told him."

"I saw you at the Holy Sepulchre to-day," said the young curate opposite, leaning forward rather suddenly, and speaking across the table with an elaborate air of not hearing this last anecdote. "I saw you at the Holy Sepulchre this afternoon, with your brother."

Mrs. Thayer looked up from her plate and smiled.

"I — yes, I was there," said Constance, shortly.

"I think I overheard your brother asking for the exact — "

"I beg your pardon, but Mr. Stuart is not my brother."

"Oh, ah, really! I beg your pardon I'm sure, but I thought — I did not know — and seeing you always together I imagined — "

"Have you decided whether we start to-morrow, Fanny?" said Miss Varley, speaking in a very clear and incisive way.

Mrs. Thayer smiled again and looked down. "I — no really, I don't know," she answered very gently. "Perhaps — don't you think you had better ask Mr. Stuart?"

And then after dinner they all go back again to the Thayers' rooms, high up among the gray and crowded roofs. A lamp is already burning on the table when they enter. There is a heaped-up fire in the open grate. Fanny is always a chilly little soul; she crosses straight over to the fireplace now, and nestles down beside it, holding up her small, thin, white hands to screen her face. "Your cigarettes are on the mantlepiece behind you, Tom," says Constance, turning round with a lighted candle in each hand. An ample abundance of light is a requisite of happiness for Miss Varley. "And I — By Jove! if we start off to-morrow I *must* write to the governor to-night," says Jack with a smothered groan.

Four years ago Mr. Stuart, having in some mysterious

fashion successfully fulfilled the inscrutable requirements of a university examination, delighted his family and surprised himself by acquiring the undisputed right of attaching the letters B.A. as an honorable distinction, a qualifying and classifying appendix to his name. And this, after some thirty minutes of laborious silence, is the letter he entreats Miss Varley to read:—

"DAMASCUS HOTEL, JERUSALEM,
March 25, 187—.

"MY DEAR FATHER,—

"Yours of the 27th ult. came safely to hand, at Cairo. Thanks for your offer of increasing the sum. For the present I have more than enough, but will draw upon you at Damascus, as you suggest, should I find my expenses increasing. We reached Jerusalem safely last Monday week, and have been seeing sights ever since. I called on old Mr. Thurlow and gave him your letter; but the son is away at present, and the matter will have to wait over until his return. This will explain to you ——"

"Oh, all that is nothing. Go on; that part is only business," said Jack.

"—— explain to you any delay which may arise. Tell mother Jerusalem is a larger place than she would expect to find. And, by-the-way, exchange is lower here than at Beyrout. It stands on the summit of a broad irregular mountain range. It has a very dreary and desolate aspect. White rocks project on every side from the scanty soil, except where there is a fountain, or a dusky olive rears up its round top and casts its dark shadow on the ground. The city is very badly built, and the pavement beastly. How sad is the contrast between former glory and present misery! Clusters of tottering houses, in bad repair, and filthy lanes occupy the building site of Solomon's gilded halls and Herod's marble ——"

"You don't think it sounds a little, just a little, as though you had been reading 'Murray,' Mr. Stuart?"

"Oh, I don't think the governor objects to 'Murray,'" says Jack, with perfect seriousness.

"—— and Herod's marble courts. Yesterday we went to see the wailing of the Jews. It was very amusing. We also visited the Mosque of Omar."

"The Mosque of Omar. There! That is what stopped me. I thought you might give me an idea or two about it. Just enough to fill up this half-page, you know," says Jack.

Now, among all the wonderful and suggestive sights in this most wonderful and suggestive of cities, surely that very Mosque of Calif Omar is the crown. Those outer walls, covered with Persian tiles, cream-white and blue; that thick and bursting tracery of bud and leaf and blossom, which binds the pale-gray dome; the broad flagged walks; the wide, green, flower-sweet stillness of the place, beneath the swaying cypress-trees — I question if Miss Varley had forgotten a single detail of all that proud and joyous pageant. But the magic of beauty lies within. For every window is sombre, yet luminous and glowing — a mass of crushed jewels, through which the sunlight filters to the floor. And all about that dome — resplendent with gold and green and blue, deep as the inner petal of an iris-flower, clear as the transparent depth, the pale-green light of a wave, and coiling, serpent-wise, about the arch — there runs a tracery of mysterious characters, a strange and splendid writing on the wall. And underneath this lies a barren hill-top, a naked mountain summit — the Holy Place made sacred to another race of men.

"About the Mosque of Omar? No. I'm afraid I cannot think of any thing — suitable," Miss Varley answers slowly.

There is a folding case of photographs lying face downwards on the table, and as the girl speaks she

turns it over mechanically, then looks long and earnestly at the faces it contains. It is only another version of the same family circle you will find in the first collection of portraits which chances to come your way. There is nothing particularly new or striking in any of the personalities which it suggests, and yet Miss Varley looks attentively at them all — at the elderly lady in black, with the firm-set mouth — ("That 's an awful thing of mother, but fair people always photograph badly, you know") — at the pretty girl with the elaborate coiffure dating some two years back ; at the banker's shrewd and handsome features, so oddly reproduced in such quaint miniature in the half-grown boy by his side. "That is not bad of little Jim," says Fanny, carelessly, coming up and looking over Miss Varley's shoulder ; "Jim looks like you, I think."

"Oh, Jim has got the governor's nose, worse luck for him," says Jack, complacently, with a half-glance at the tarnished mirror which decorates the wall.

"Three or four photos and an empty place. I must give you one of mine, Jack, to fill up. Or is that place reserved for the future Mrs. Stuart?" asks Fanny, looking up with a smile. It is some few years now since the general unaccountability of woman's actions has ceased to preoccupy Major Thayer. And yet more than once that evening he catches himself silently wondering what the deuce there was in that remark to make Constance blush !

CHAPTER IV.

GOING TO JERICHO.

"BUT if you really want to know — "

"You know that I really do."

"And are perfectly sincere about it?"

"Perfectly so."

"Well, in that case, I should advise you — to — oh, to ask her the question yourself," said Mrs. Thayer, coolly, looking up in her companion's face with a provoking little laugh.

It was two hours or more since they had left Jerusalem. It had been early morning still as they sallied forth from the city-gate, a long confused line of gaily caparisoned horses, and stolid baggage-laden mules; the sun shining here and there on the long matchlocks of the Arab escort, or on the fluttering curtain of Fanny's palanquin — and since then the barren road had wound steadily, stonily down. The first freshness of the day died as they crossed the rosy cloud of blossoms about Bethany. Since then the landscape had grown strangely, monotonously arid — a desolate mountain-side — gray stones, gray skies, and fields whose scanty covering hardly veiled the rock, with here and there a patch of burning red, where the crimson flame of the anemones cast a glory about this pale and sterile land. It was two hours or more since they had left Jerusalem. It was two hours or more since Mr. Stuart had ridden on by the side of Fanny's litter. And still he spoke of Constance.

"I don't pretend to know more about women than any other man," — Mrs. Thayer smiled — "but a fellow can't knock about the world as long as I have without

finding out a thing or two for himself; and I can assure you, Constance is by no means like any other girl," the young man went on with simple earnestness, quite unmindful of the look of suppressed amusement shining in his listener's clear brown eyes. "I don't think I ever saw any one like her before; so proud, so independent, so wilful, and then so gentle with it all. And she is so full of fun, and so clever, and bright; and then, all at once — while you are talking to her, perhaps — there will come a look into her face as though she had forgotten all about you, as though she did not even hear your voice, or as if she were listening to some other voices calling her from far off; and that will be, perhaps, just when you are trying to be most pleasant: and then, just as you have decided she has the saddest face you ever saw in your life — why then she turns around and begins laughing at you for being so grave, until — until you think — until, by Jove! you don't know what to think, you know."

"I am afraid the front mule has caught his foot through one of those loose straps. I think he is going a little lame. Would you mind making sure of it, Jack?" said Mrs. Thayer with perfect gravity.

"And then she is so kind, so careful of the people about her. You do not know the trouble she takes, Fanny; but I know it, for I have seen it. But if you should speak to her about it — that is quite another thing. It is an accident, or you have been mistaken, or perhaps she will only laugh at you for noticing it at all. Now there was yesterday, for instance — "

"I wonder if it would be *quite* impossible to make them step more together, Jack? If you would only speak to Saïd — I am sure — Thanks! that is better so. And now, you may go on with your anecdotes now, if you like," said Mrs. Thayer, in a sleepy voice.

But Mr. Stuart was silent. "Don't be absurd now, Jack," said Fanny carelessly, a moment later.

The road had taken a sudden turn to the left; one after the other they could see the scattered horsemen

gaining the top of the opposite ravine. "Don't be absurd now, Jack. This weather is really too hot to make it worth one's while to get offended. And then you must remember this is not exactly the first time I hear you indulging in a little harmless sentiment. There was that Schuyler girl, for instance — was it last winter, now, or was it only this spring — I heard you rave about — "

"Oh, bother that Schuyler girl!" said Mr. Stuart, hotly.

"Ah, well, I never could see much in her myself, you know. But then I don't believe in discussing other people's tastes. It is generally safer not to discuss what you mean to oppose," Mrs. Thayer rejoined calmly. "But as for this last fancy of yours, I 'll tell you what it is," cried Fanny, in a sudden, artless burst of confidence, "I 'll tell you what it is, Jack — I 'm going to give you a piece of excellent advice — don't try and get up a flirtation with Constance. For, in the first place, you could not do it, you know; and, in the next place, I should not allow it; and in the next — Look here, Jack. I am going to be perfectly frank with you. I am not going to have Constance vexed or troubled, or her pleasure spoiled by any such nonsense as *that*. And then, on your own account, my dear boy — "

"You are very good. But it does not strike you — stand still there, will you! — it does not strike you that all this anxiety may be just a trifle premature? I don't presume to say any thing about Miss Varley, of course; but as for myself, I never found any very great difficulty in looking after my own affairs hitherto, and — and — that is a pretty bit of view over there, Fanny, do you see?"

"Very pretty."

"Do you happen to know, have you the slightest idea, where Hassan intends to give us lunch to-day?"

"Not the slightest."

"I — I — oh, confound it all! I should like to know what I have done that you should treat me so," the young

man burst out with sudden passion; "you who always called yourself my friend! If I *am* in a scrape I would like to know who brought me here. And I did not — no, I did not — think you would throw me over in this way just when I needed your help the most," he said, with a curious break in his voice, a curious look of trouble clouding his handsome sunburned face.

Have you ever tried to realize for yourself the feelings of a small but active spider, towards yonder large and fatuous bluebottle drawing nearer and nearer in everlessening circles to the puzzling, shining web — the fine contempt, the delightful thrill of anticipated triumph, the unhesitating recognition of the beneficent intentions of Nature, of the great moral law so unmistakably expressed in the relative positions of spider and fly? I believe Mrs. Thayer understood it all at that moment. It is true that we have every reason to suppose that the spiders are less preoccupied with the bluebottle's sensations than with their own.

Fanny was keenly conscious of rendering the most praiseworthy, the most vital, assistance possible to the furtherance of the ultimate ends of Providence; her mind was filled with a quiet pleasure, her face with the friendliest, kindliest light. It was with quite a new sense of gratified power, with quite a new confidence in her own perspicacity, that she said suddenly, —

"Did you ever meet Mr. Stuyvesant, of Newport? You cannot expect me to quarrel with you, Jack. That 's a thing I won't even do for Tom. Of course I can't help it, if you choose to resent my sympathy and call it patronage. As I said before, there is no accounting for the fluctuations of a man's taste. But, did you ever happen to meet Mr. Stuyvesant?"

"Morris Stuyvesant, you mean? Little man, with curly hair, who keeps a yacht and drives four-in-hand in the park? Yes, I know him. He banks with us. Why?"

"I never saw him. What is he like?" said Fanny, eagerly.

"Very much like anybody else, I suppose, except that he has more money. I don't know much about him. He belongs to quite another set from mine," the young man said impatiently. "But I wonder you haven't seen him! He is rather dull, I think — a typical heavy swell — and very fast, and enormously wealthy. And there isn't a woman in New York to-day who has not, at some time, tried to get him to marry some one — herself or somebody else. It 's the one creditable thing I 've ever heard of him, by Jove! to think that they have not succeeded yet."

"Constance would not marry him," said Mrs. Thayer.

"Constance — well, I don't know," said Mr. Stuart, bluntly, "women are — women, all the world over, I suppose." It was curious to note how the likeness to his father came out and deepened as he spoke. It was like a prophecy — a palpable foreshadowing of all the shrewd, ordinary, undeniable convictions with which the years were to limit and bind about his life. "Women are — women, I suppose; and Stuyvesant is awfully rich."

"So Mrs. Van Ness told me; and the story is no secret in any way. Everybody knew it down at Nahant, last summer. It was while I was ill, you know, and Constance was visiting Aunt Van. Sometimes I have thought if *I* had been there — but no! I daresay it would have been of absolutely no avail," she added, with a perfectly unaffected sigh. "But Aunt Van was something perfectly awful. You don't know Mrs. Van Ness, Jack? Ah, well, it would be difficult for you to understand it then."

"You don't mean to say — stand *still*, you brute, when I tell you to! — you don't mean to say, Fanny, that Morris Stuyvesant actually had the effrontery, the — the cheek to ask Constance — to ask Miss Varley to marry him!"

"It *was* a compliment, I know," said Mrs. Thayer, gravely. "It was quite the match of the season. And Aunt Van was so unhappy about it all! When Aunt Van is unhappy she has a way of saying 'my dear,'

which is simply paralyzing. You feel that your life is merely a wicked mistake. And then she will sit a whole evening without speaking, looking at you and thinking about you until you wish you were dead. And every now and then there comes one small tear into the corner of her pale, porcelain eyes. Constance says it is like drawing water from a rock: you feel as though you had interfered with the economy of Nature."

"And he — he actually asked Constance to marry him!" said Jack, between his teeth.

"Oh, dear, yes; such a scene. 'Why won't you marry him, Constance?' 'Because I don't care to, auntie dear.' 'And why don't you care to then, when it is your duty, your manifest duty, to be down on your knees thanking Providence and your old aunt for what they have done for you?' And so on. I'm not sure they did not call in the clergyman. I know there was an appeal to the authorities at home. I never quite understood that part of it myself," added Fanny, thoughtfully. "Captain Varley is always uneasy about money. I should have thought he would have brought his influence to bear, and I am not generally mistaken in such matters." But, indeed, in this case Mrs. Thayer was only partly right, Captain Varley being one of the many people in whom that complaint of poverty is like the muscular contraction of a snake — a mere mechanical indication of past anguish, an appearance which endures long after its cause has passed away. But Mrs. Thayer was partly right, as usual. For it is a subject of no small wonderment to the present writer to reflect upon the unbewildered accuracy with which a limited mind can detect and estimate the paltriest motives which influence its noblest fellow-men. One wonders at times if there *could* be any impulse so unworthy as to escape the instant recognition of one's friends.

"I never quite understood that part of it myself," said little Fanny, thoughtfully. "But it was a splendid offer — a splendid opportunity — wasted. Has Constance ever regretted it? I do not know. She is — the

Varleys are all curious, in a way — quixotic, romantic ; I hardly know how to call it, but odd, decidedly. And Constance is very like her father in that. You should see the woman Captain Varley has married, Jack ! And I think she was quite capable of caring for him, and yet refusing him for some inscrutable reason of her own. Perhaps she was too proud. Perhaps — I have known hundreds of girls in my time, hundreds of them, but I never knew even one who was not a perfect little fool about matters of that kind," said Mrs. Thayer, with an air of profound conviction.

They rode on for several moments in silence. It was now nearly eleven o'clock. The heat had grown intense. For the last hour the road had been steadily growing more wild and more deserted, winding higher and higher among the fastnesses of the bleak and crumbling rock. The sky was colorless and blank and very low ; a sky of brass ; one wide, white, blinding glare, beating pitilessly down upon this arid wilderness of stone. The heavy silence of the noon lay all around. One by one the white-cloaked horsemen of the escort had ridden silently forward and disappeared among the rocks, and now there was no living thing in sight but the covered and curtained litter crawling slowly along the narrow mountain-trail. And the mules rattled their betasselled harness ; Mr. Stuart's horse picked his way cautiously among the rolling stones, and chafed and champed impatiently against his bit. From behind the palanquin there rose a slow and wailing chant, the melancholy, monotonous song of the Arab muleteer ; it seemed the very voice and expression of all this dead and silent and shadowless land.

The mules rattled their betasselled harness, the palanquin shifted round and lurched heavily to one side. " Oh, have we got there at last? but I think I have been asleep," said Fanny, waking up with a start.

And this was the moment Mr. Stuart chose to make the following surprising proposition : —

" I have been thinking," the young man said gloomily

—and indeed it was undeniable that he had been most unusually preoccupied for several moments past—"I have been thinking that I will not go any farther with you than Jerusalem."

Mrs. Thayer was silent.

"It is not as though you could not all get on perfectly well without me, for I am merely an addition—a postscript, as it were—to the original party, you know."

And still Mrs. Thayer did not speak.

"Now there were those fellows I was talking to last week," the young man went on, in a rather less decided way, "they asked me to join them in the Lebanon. And Hassan tells me there is still a little shooting left. And—and if I took the next steamer to Beyrout—"

And then Mrs. Thayer looked up at him with a smile. "I don't think I should go if I were you, Jack," she said, in her clearest voice. She leaned a little farther out of her litter, and laid her hand affectionately upon his arm. "You absurd boy! But if you care so much to know what Constance thought of him, why don't you ask her the question yourself?" she said, with great good-humor.

And even as she spoke the road turned sharply to the left; a group of picketed horses stood in the midst of the small platform before them; farther on some men were boiling their coffee and smoking about a fire; they had reached the midday encampment, and already Constance was coming lightly forward to welcome them to its narrow strip of shade. Mr. Stuart looked at her with a curious mingling of question and surprise. It seemed to him that he had never really seen her before. He thought of Fanny's story; but no! how was it possible to associate any idea of disappointment or regret with the glance of those clear blue eyes, with that frank and happy smile?

There was only a narrow strip of shade under the crumbling walls of the deserted khan, and as Constance took her place at lunch all the light from the wide open

sky seemed reflected in her face, and in the loose and shining masses of her hair.

"And without even a hat, and with your complexion! Oh, Constance, how burned you will be!" said Fanny, in lazy remonstrance.

Miss Varley laughed. "Don't allude to bygones, dear. I was fair once, I know; but that was before we went to Egypt. For now — look, Mr. Stuart" — she pushed back the sleeve of her riding-habit above her wrist — "look here."

"Do you believe that *can* be a bit of myself? or is it a case of mistaken identity?" she said, laughing, and holding out her hand.

"Yes, I see," said Jack, absently, still keeping his eyes fixed upon her face. And then, after a moment, "I — I beg your pardon. I am afraid I did not quite understand what you were saying?" And, indeed, the young fellow was in a singular state of mental perturbation, and excitement, and doubt. "The boy is looking quite upset. What have you been doing to him, Fanny?" Major Thayer inquired, pausing in the act of lighting his cigar, and looking curiously at his cousin striding away. But Mrs. Thayer only laughed. Syria was hotter, decidedly hotter, than Egypt, she observed, with cheerful irrelevance.

The men had laid aside their empty nargilehs, the mules were once more harnessed to the litter, rugs were being rolled, and saddle-girths tightened for the descent, before Mr. Stuart joined the others once more. As he came sauntering up, the Major was pointing out the road to his wife — that road by which a certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell among thieves.

"I believe this may have been the very inn; or, at least, the site is the same," said Fanny, with enthusiasm. "Look at its position, crowning the ridge, on the very pinnacle of the pass, overlooking all the plain. Tom, I believe this is the place. I know it is. If dear old Dr. Adams were only here! And — Oh, here 's Jack!"

But Jack had passed on. "What are you looking at, Miss Varley?" he asked, abruptly, going up and leaning his arms on the broken parapet beside her, and staring down into the depths of the ravine.

The girl smiled and pointed with her whip. "You see those flowers there? No, farther down; on that little ledge where the wall is broken? I was considering the lilies of the field. They are the first ones we have seen. And quite out of reach."

"Ah, yes. I see. Yes, they are out of reach," said Stuart.

But half an hour afterward — as the road grew more abrupt, Miss Varley heard a clattering of horse's hoofs pressing nearer and nearer, and presently some one rode up and held out a handful of half-withered flowers. "There — there are your lilies," said Jack.

Constance started and looked round, and then the color rushed to her cheeks. "Oh, Mr. Stuart! But you should not have done it — indeed, you should not."

"Oh, that was not any thing at all," the young man said, carelessly. "I'm not a bad hand at climbing. And I knew you wanted them. And I thought — I thought perhaps you might give me one of them — to keep," he added, with an embarrassed laugh, and leaned forward and stroked his horse carefully between the ears.

She looked at him a moment in silence — a grave, inquiring look, which sent a curious thrill of excitement through him — and then an expression of great friendliness and liking came into her face; she gave him the flower without a word. She gave him the flower, and for one instant he touched her gauntleted hand, and he saw her blue eyes looking into his.

"Thank you," he said, beneath his breath. Half-unconsciously he lifted his hat, with a curious feeling of doing her homage, as he reined in his horse to let her pass him by.

Now Stuart was nothing more than an honest, good-natured, rather self-indulgent, rather talkative young

fellow, you might object — a perfectly commonplace character, incapable, in all probability, of any great passion; unvisited as yet by any deep or vital experience of life; a character, too, which the budding germs of a latent Philistinism — the barren blight of common sense — would alone have debarred from any claim to consideration as a hero of romance. And yet, was there ever a day so prosaic or so dull that some subtle stirring of color in the morning sky, some rosy revelation of the dawn, has not linked it to all the infinite possibilities of beauty? or ever a life too indifferent to all joy not to feel and stir in the blossom-time of its experience — the brief, warm, heyday of its youth?

It was four o'clock by the time they reached the foot of the hills, and turned their horses across the long and undulating plain. A fringe of trees, a tall and waving fringe of reeds, lay straight across their track, marking the boundaries of a little stream; and a short, quick canter soon brought them to its ford, where the tangled branches cast their deepest shadow over the rushing, bubbling brook. No words could describe the deep relief of that cool silence — made only the deeper by the low, cool murmur of the water's flow. The riders stopped, or rather the horses stopped halfway across, drinking greedily, and wading farther and farther up the stream till the water gurgled above their very knees. It was all so still, the little birds in the bushes began to sing once more, fluttering from tree to tree across the brook until the horses would pause for a moment to look around them before plunging their heads in again with deep and eager delight. And then, after some ten minutes' halt, the little caravan again pressed forward, up the steep side of a hill and along a wide plateau, where the narrow bridle-path wound in and out between the scattered clumps of mimosa trees, until one had to bend to the saddle-bow to escape the clutch of their thorny branches.

And then there came a company of mounted Bedaween; brown-faced, brown-robed, and sullen-eyed ma-

rauders ; and after them followed a troop of big brown cows, who scrambled along like goats, stopping at every step to snatch another mouthful of the short, close grass, until the advancing cavalcade alarmed and separated the herd, and they swept by the horses in wild and jostling disorder.

"Exit the noble savage. Do you know those are the first living creatures we have met in all this day?"

"I should be sorry to hurt your feelings, Constance ; I really should. Consequently I will *not* remark that your favorite children of the desert look not unlike a group of Digger Indians," said Major Thayer, slowly.

"Please God we not lose any chickens to-night," added Hassan with a groan.

The handsome sheikh bowed gravely in his saddle. "The will of God be done."

And now the horses quickened their pace, and threw up their heads and went off in a wild gallop, at sight of the circle of canvas domes. That night the tents were pitched by the side of Elisha's Well, — a little, clear, splashing spring which starts from under a high rock, runs past a fringe of fern and flowers for a few hundred feet, and then disappears again underground. And soon its tinkling lift and fall was the only touch of coolness left. For with sunset the heat grew more intense ; the wind became more sultry ; wild gusts of dust and sand came whirling whitely down across the stony platform from the hillside above it ; and now the sky was of a threatening sulphurous tone, and lurid gleams of light broke through the heavy clouds, throwing a curious reddish glow over all the green tangle of branches beneath.

As Miss Varley came out of her tent and looked about her, the very air seemed to have grown thick with this suffused yellow light. Nature was in suspense. There was a feeling of suppressed horror in the livid light, in the wild shifting of the clouds, in the low ominous muttering of thunder dying away among the naked hills.

And as the night grew darker this sense of unrest and expectation deepened.

"It is like the moment before a miracle — like waiting for some revelation," Constance said. And indeed the very animals about the camp had caught the infection of terror and disquiet; the horses refused to eat, and stood facing the wind with wildly-streaming manes; and even Lione thrust his golden head between Miss Varley's hands, and moaned and struggled in his sleep.

It was almost a relief after dinner when this tension of silence was broken by a succession of savage cries — a wild, high-pitched, rattling call like the voice of some animal grown fierce and unfamiliar with pain. And "There is some Bedawy, ladies and gentlemen," said Hassan, pushing back the door of the tent. "And the chief he come down to do you honor and show you one dance."

And presently the chairs and rugs had all been carried outside. A long line of men were drawn up in front of the dining-tent; at one end a shadowy group of veiled women and children stood back awaiting their turn; and before them the old sheikh of the tribe, with a drawn sword in his hand. As the travellers came out he began his dance, accompanied by the howls and cries of all the spectators, and marked by a certain rude rhythm kept by the clapping of hands. It was a singular and exciting performance; for as the words of the chant were changed the chief would vary his action, now charging the whole line with a flashing sweep of his sword; now crouching to the ground as if in ambush, or again throwing himself at their feet and writhing as if wounded unto death. And after every change he would come rushing up to Major Thayer, circle his sword about his head, and again that wild and rattling chorus would start the sleeping echoes of the hill. The two long white cotton lanterns shook in the wind, casting long curious shadows, wild unexpected gleams of light, upon those savage shapes. Fanny had fallen asleep in her chair; her husband had long since strolled away.

As Stuart lay stretched out upon the Persian carpet at Miss Varley's feet and looking up into her face they two seemed, to the young man's excited fancy, the only possessors of a new and fantastic world; a world peopled by shadowy, swaying forms, full of strange sounds, of warm and sudden wind — full, too, of a pale and misty moonlight, of vague and enervated and measureless delight. And Constance?

He was lying, I have said, at her feet; but not all the width of the universe, had he but known it, could have held those two farther apart.

For Miss Varley, too, was thinking. And as, later on, she lay upon her bed, tossing restlessly from side to side, it seemed those thoughts had well-nigh banished sleep. The wind had loosened the fastenings of her tent-door. Presently she rose to tighten the cords, and, as she did so, some sudden impulse made her pause and push aside the curtain and look out. The moon had risen high above the clouds; a great, an infinite silvery stillness lay all about the sleeping camp. From their stony platform she looked down upon a waving sea of tree-tops — a love-gift once to Cleopatra from Mark Antony, and now a dark and rustling solitude where only the night wind seemed awake. But as the girl stood there at the door of her tent, the wind lifting her loosened hair from off her forehead, blowing softly and coolly about her small bare feet — of a sudden, there arose a sweet delicious gurgle of sound from among the tangled bushes. It was the voice of a nightingale, singing to the silence and to the stars. And, as she listened, a change swept over the grave proud face, her lips parted, her eyes grew soft and filled with tears. She lifted her face imploringly, with a sudden gesture of passionate emotion.

"Oh, my love," she said, "my love! when — when are you coming back to me?"

CHAPTER V.

SHOWING WHY MISS VARLEY LOOKED AT THE STARS.

IT was when Constance Varley first began to have her frocks lengthened, her lessons shortened, and her opinion more or less consulted in regard to both — she was, in a word, about fifteen years old — when an event took place which merits to be briefly mentioned.

It was at the close of morning school, and a certain riotous stillness was beginning to make itself apparent among the young ladies of the Misses De Walker's French and Family Finishing Establishment. A subdued sound of opening desks, the furtive rustling of contraband paper parcels, a mysterious and increasing succession of smothered laughs, were all witnesses to the absence of any high authority. Matters were evidently approaching a crisis — delayed for a moment as all the heads were lifted, and all eyes turned to watch the servant bringing a message to the door.

"The young ladies will please give a little attention. Silence there on the left! Young ladies, I must really beg you to be a little more respectful," said Miss Smith, looking up, flushed and wearied, from a chaotic pile of accounts. "Miss Morgan and Constance Varley are wanted in the parlor." And then, as Constance passes her, "I think it is your father, my dear," the governess adds in kindly preparation. For it is a well-known fact that Constance adores her father. She has seen him perhaps a dozen times in all her life — brief visits snatched in the interval between each cruise — and has already lavished an amount of ardent hero-worship, of unquestioning admiration, upon her idealized recollection of him, which cannot but give a coloring and bent to all her after years.

"And you are never going away again, papa; never, never going away any more?" she says exultingly a moment later, standing with both hands clasped about her father's arm; "you are going to give up the ship at last, and live on that nice half-pay, and have a home in the country. Oh, papa, a home in the country for you and me together! And Fanny shall live with us, of course — Fanny shall live with us always; but I am to be the housekeeper, you know. Fanny shall be the lady, but I am going to be your helper."

"And Aunt Van? Have you forgotten Aunt Van?" says Captain Varley, smiling and smoothing back her hair.

"Oh, bother Aunt Van!" answers Constance, gaily. "Papa, I wish you had a better-regulated mind! It is a deplorable thing to be so utterly devoid of seriousness in discussing vital subjects. For listen to me, please. I want some chickens. You may have all the cows and sheep and oxen for your very own, but I must have some chickens — and a horse — and — and what else can people have who are going to live in the real country and be as happy as the day is long?"

And as she asks the question Fate appears in the doorway to answer it — a dark-haired, deep-eyed Fate, who stops and hesitates, and stands with a pile of loose and fluttering papers in her hand. "I beg your pardon, I did not know there was any one here."

"Oh, it is not of the slightest consequence. You have not disturbed us at all," says Fanny, coolly. "Only — would you be so very kind as to shut the door carefully as you go out? There is really a terrible draught."

But Constance has already started forward, and is taking her destiny by the hand. "Come in, Miss Smith. Do come in," she says in her friendly young voice. "It is only papa, you know. And, papa, this is Miss Smith."

Captain Varley has already risen, and you see at a glance where Constance got that fine upright carriage.

"Miss Smith will honor us by making use of the room. I am always happy to see my daughter's friends," he answers with grave courtesy.

"You forget that we are only school-girls yet. We could hardly presume to call ourselves Miss Smith's friends," says Fanny in her sweetest voice. "And — "

"Miss Morgan is right. I am only the nursery governess here. I teach the little ones their multiplication-table, and keep the accounts, and hear the young ladies practise, Captain Varley. Miss Morgan is quite right — I am not anybody's friend," adds Miss Smith, turning very pale.

Poor Captain Varley turns from one to the other, from his ward to his daughter's governess, with a puzzled look on his frank and weather-beaten face. And it is curious to notice how you see the expression repeated on the frank young countenance by his side. For, as may already have been remarked, Miss Varley's views of life are rather more primitive than is usual even with young ladies who have enjoyed all the opportunities for ignorance offered by a liberal education. "In fact, you made a perfect little goose of yourself, my dear," Miss Morgan informs her later on, in private. "And as for the presumption of that creature in accepting your father's invitation — ! I won't go to the theatre with you at all. Yes, I will. I'll go, and do what you have not the sense to do yourself — "

"Poor thing, and why should she not have a little pleasure then?" answers Constance, simply. And, indeed, why should she not?

Dressed in her best black gown, a bunch of flowers in her hand, a red camellia in her hair — ("It is years, years, since any one has sent me such flowers as these," she says softly, looking up into Captain Varley's face, with a fine expression of gratitude in those great dark eyes, which not even the Misses De Walker's unpaid bills have yet contrived to tarnish) — dressed I say in her best, seated in the front of an opera-box, a handsome man by her side, and all about her a flood of light and

music, why should not this poor woman forget for an evening all the disappointments, the regret, it might be the remorse, of her life? For that Miss Smith was a young person with experiences was really an undeniable fact.

"It is a pretty stage seen *from the boxes*, is it not?" asked Fanny, bending forward with a sneer.

Miss Smith is a young woman with a history, and you may be sure her pupils at the Establishment are not unacquainted with the fact. But is she, then, so very much worse than her neighbors? If the truth must be told, it was Fanny herself who was the chief narrator, the firmest believer, in these reports. Indeed, I never could persuade myself that those particular anecdotes were any more worthy of credence than any of the other thousand and one legends which form the daily entertainment of our friends. For how, to take only one instance, — how, I ask you, was it probable that Miss Morgan should be so thoroughly versed in all the details about young Winslow's unlucky passion, or the reasons which led to Miss Smith's change of home? As for her having deliberately planned to attract Captain Varley's attention, could it for a moment be believed that such conduct was even possible under the sheltering wing of the Misses De Walker's maternal and Christian care?

"Maternal and Christian fiddlestick!" retorts Fanny with profound contempt. "Miss De Walker is an old cat, and Miss Philena is another. They take their teachers where they can pay the least, and as for that creature — Captain Varley is only my guardian, I know. But if he were *my* father, Constance — "

"If he were your father, Fanny — but we will not talk about that, dear. Only, the king can do no wrong," said Miss Varley turning very pale.

And "Our poor Constance is as infatuated as ever, and as blind as even Miss Smith could desire. Indeed, dear Mrs. Van Ness, I fear it will not be very long

before I shall see myself forced to take refuge with you. For I fear the catastrophe is even nearer than we think," Miss Morgan wrote prophetically to a certain old lady at Nahant. It was the one relaxation into strong dislike which Fanny ever allowed herself, and she hated Miss Smith with all the repressed virulence of a studiously amiable character.

And, indeed, it was not long before her prediction came to pass. It was hardly a month, I think, after that unlucky night at the opera, before Miss Varley was wanted in the schoolroom parlor again. The interview was very short and very quiet until just at the last. "I hope, I do hope you will be happy, papa," the girl cried out with a sudden burst of passion, as her father was bidding her good-by. She took up his hand in both of hers, and laid her cheek against it with a caressing motion that was habitual to her. "You — you won't forget me, dear?" she said very gently. The Captain congratulated himself with honest satisfaction upon the sensible fashion in which his little girl was seconding his plans.

The days went on and on. Captain Varley was often in town now, but it was seldom he found time to visit his daughter's school. Once they met him walking down the street He was dressed with scrupulous care in entirely new clothes, and was giving his arm to Miss Smith. Miss Morgan threw up her head at the sight, and would have walked on without speaking, but Constance stopped and insisted upon shaking her future stepmother's hand. It was not for *her* to question her father's choice, the girl thought proudly, choking back her tears. The months went on and on, and brought with them the marriage; went on and on, and now Miss Smith's matrimonial speculation had grown to be an old story, and there were newer and more interesting weddings in view.

"You must come and stay with me this year," wrote young Mrs. Thayer some six months afterwards. "I want you, Constance — and you will only be in their

way at home." And indeed by this time I think the poor girl was amply conscious of the fact. For this ill-assorted marriage was proving itself a great success to the two most intimately concerned — a success so complete that not even Mrs. Thayer could question its duration.

As for Constance — but whatever Constance felt, we know how she had accepted the situation from the first. And as the years rolled by, and there came other claimants to her father's love, when baby fingers and baby voices had made the final conquest of his home, I think there even grew to be a certain kindness between Miss Varley and her father's second wife.

"There 's my good Constance! But I always knew you would behave like a good, sensible girl, my dear," the Captain remarked to her with genuine pleasure.

And "Yes, papa; I would do any thing for you, you know," the girl answered, and caught his hand in hers and laid her cheek against it with a silent caress, with a curious new pang at her heart. The old love was there, the old tenderness was there; but the old passionate admiration, the old ideal, where were they now?

Constance had been a year or more at home — she had grown into a tall, serious-faced, sad-eyed girl of nineteen — before the long-promised visit to Mrs. Thayer came to pass. As she thinks of those days now, they seem the nearest — as, indeed, they are the most vivid — of her life. For it was at Fanny's house, at The Farm, that Constance found the second, the last, the supreme passion of her life. It was a man most unlike her father whom this fond idol-worshipper had now elected to fill the empty temple of her faith; but I think there was a certain resemblance in the quality of the deep and silent and loyal devotion she lavished upon them both.

It is an old story now, dating some three years back. Indifference, custom, time, new faces, and new lands have come between her and her love. As she stands there listening to the song of that nightingale, looking

up at those serene and melancholy stars, how weak, how short, the time and distance seem! It is evening now again in the old house at home, a mild spring evening of three years before; she is walking up and down the garden-path with the children, and Fanny has written her a letter: —

"Are you not coming back to me soon? Do come back, there 's a darling, for I really cannot do without you any longer; and surely Mrs. Varley is well enough to spare you now. Do come back! We all want you — that is, all but one. 'And when shall we see you at The Farm again?' I asked that one, only this morning. 'Probably never. Who ever heard of a man going to Paradise twice,' he said, driving off. Pretty, wasn't it? But then he has a way of saying those pretty things, as you know. And, by-the-way, he left his compliments for *Schön-Rohtraut*, and another message — I have forgotten what. However, that is of the less consequence, as I question if we shall see that *beau tenebreux* again. At all events, he has already sailed for Europe. Tom swears it was business which called him away. *I* think he was simply bored; and, indeed, the only wonder is we should have kept that unquiet spirit for so long. Of course, the saddest part of it all is the check it gives to our unfortunate play. We are seriously proposing to cast Jack Stuart for the missing part, and if you will only come back ——"

And so on.

"Conny," said little Walter, plucking curiously at her skirt; "has oo been naughty, Conny? Is oo doin' to ky?"

She looked at him with a blank, bewildered face. She stooped and loosened the little hands, and walked away without a word. And, indeed, what words could describe the storm of shame and incredulous despair, the wild agony of longing which filled that proud and passionate heart? The coming years might bring their

slow-gathering proof of loyalty, but it was at that moment, there in that sunny spring garden among the budding trees, that Constance measured, once for all, the force, the vitality, the depth of this her wasted love.

And presently the brief flickering sunshine faded from off the garden-walks, a face looked out of the window, a servant came to the door, the children went clamorously in to tea, and Constance was alone.

She was alone. It was a mild, warm evening at the end of March. Spring had come, but the snow was still lying in loose white patches in the hollows of the hill, and the air was full of the damp, earthy smell of the freshly-ploughed fields. Presently she paused in her aimless walking and unclenched her hands, smoothed out the crumpled folds of Fanny's letter — it was too dark to read their meaning now — and sat wearily down upon the steps of the porch.

She was very tired. She leaned her head upon her hand; the tears rolled slowly down across her fingers; she never moved to brush them away. She was tired. From across the road she could hear the chilly tinkle of the thawing brook; a thin white wreath of fog was creeping slowly nearer between the trunks of the apple-trees in the orchard. It seemed to her that she had seen it all before, had lived through it all before, had known it from the very first.

And now it was all over. "I doubt," said Fanny, "if we shall ever see him again." The intolerable weight of time was pressing on her already, and it was not an hour since she knew that he was gone. He was gone, and he had left her "his compliments"! She stood up; a hot flush mounted to her forehead; she pressed her hand against her burning eyes. But no! not even in that first moment of bitter bewildering pain, not even then would this true heart swerve from its allegiance. And once more the old faith, the old words, came to her lips: her king could do no wrong.

The pale thin mist came creeping up the path, and the wind blew keen and chill. She shivered. She lifted

her face from her hand and looked up, and there, above her head, shining down to her through the leafless branches, she saw a solitary star.

It was an old story of three years before. But as the girl stood at the door of her tent that night, the same wind seemed rustling and whispering through Cleopatra's trees. She listened to the sweet, piercingly sweet rapture of the nightingale; she lifted up her eyes, and shining through the breaking clouds, far off, and pure and steadfast as her love, she saw a solitary star.

And the nightingale went on singing, singing through the night. The clouds drifted back and covered the sky, the wind was hushed among the shadowy trees, but the nightingale went on singing till the dawn.

CHAPTER VI.

'CROSS COUNTRY.

AND in the gray of that dawn they started for the river Jordan. The day had broken wan and pale, with no sunrise, only a cold dim light, which seemed to promise rain. But how lovely every thing looked about them as they rode away from camp! It was so early the very flowers were still asleep in the grass, and only here and there the first venturesome daisies and buttercups already opened their eyes at the touch of the morning wind; but how beautiful were those far-off mountains which barred the horizon with a quivering silver light! They alone were resplendent in this gray landscape, under this gray sky; for, after passing the few low ruins of stately Jericho, the travellers rode for hours across a solitary and undulating plain — a plain without grass, or flowers, or trees — only at rare intervals some dense,

dark growth of withered-looking shrubs, which seemed clinging with a desperate tenacity to the sandy soil. There was not a living thing in sight; no movement but in the sky, where the great loose masses of gray clouds were carelessly and tumultuously drifting onward to the sea.

But the vegetation became more luxuriant as they approached the river, and close by the water's edge there was a tangled thicket of vine and bush and broad-leaved sycamore-trees, which only parted in one place far enough to show a glimpse of the turbid and sacred stream — a small and swift and muddy river, serving to fertilize a narrow strip of land lost in the wilderness of Judea.

"So that is the Jordan," said Major Thayer, after a pause.

"Yes, sir; Jordan, sir."

"I wonder — Now how wide should you say it was, at a guess?"

"I give it up. Where's 'Murray?'"

"I wish, how I do wish Dr. Adams were here! And I should like to know the precise spot where the Israelites crossed," said Fanny, with a sigh.

And then they all got off their horses, and Mrs. Thayer asked for her Bible. It had been left in the palanquin; no, in the tent.

"I am afraid he gone on with the baggage-mules, lady," said Hassan, in a deprecatory way. And then for a few moments they all wandered about under the willows and stared at the stream. And the Arabs sat around in a semicircle, and thought — heaven knows what they thought of these Christian dogs!

"Will you have one bath, gentlemen? The most gentlemen what come here they go in the water," suggested Hassan, with an anxious air.

"A bath? Oh, hang it all, no!"

Mr. Stuart strolled over to where Constance was sitting by the bank. "Stupid river that, I think," he said, pointing with his whip.

Miss Varley unclosed her eyes, and looked at it for a minute. "It is small," she assented indifferently, and let her head fall back once more against the tree. She was not looking well this morning. Her face was pale and weary-looking; her eyelids heavy, her lips colorless.

"You look tired," said Jack.

"No; but perhaps I did not sleep enough." She sat up and opened her eyes, and passed her hand through her hair. "Did you hear that nightingale last night, Mr. Stuart?"

"Nightingale? What nightingale? I did not know there was one," said the young man, in a conversational manner. He took out his knife and cut a carefully-selected branch from one of the willows. "And so there *was* a nightingale?" he repeated vaguely, and sat down on the bank by her side, and began stripping the bark from off his wand.

Miss Varley turned her head a little, and looked at him and smiled. She slipped the string of amber beads off her wrist and began swinging them slowly to and fro.

"How long — how long life seems on some days!" she said, looking down on the river at her feet.

A pause.

"Life? Oh — I don't know. What is the matter with life? I think it's — very jolly. Don't you?" answered Jack, slowly. The breaks were when he stopped to contemplate the effect of his work.

"There! I call that a very pretty monogram now," he said, presently, holding it up and gazing at it with a critical eye. "It will make you a very good riding-whip in the place of the one you lost." He twisted the stick about and snapped it two or three times in the air. "Lione! here, Lione! Come here, sir!" But the dog only turned his head round and yawned, and laid his nose upon his paws again, winking with amiable indifference.

"Hassan is filling the bottles; I must fetch you some of the water to drink," said Jack, getting up slowly to his feet.

And presently he came scrambling up the bank. "Leave me a little, will you?" he said, bending down and giving her the glass with a smile.

"Thanks."

She touched the water with her lips, and then began pouring it slowly out upon the ground.

"Oh, I say, Miss Varley, don't do that! Why, I brought it for you to drink!"

"If you will look at the dust on the leaves of that unlucky plant—"

"But I want some water myself," said Stuart, quickly, and laid a detaining hand upon her wrist.

Constance was very tall. Their two faces were nearly on a level, The young man was looking straight into her blue eyes, and there was something defiant, almost hard, in their expression. He had never seen that look before. "Let me go, Mr. Stuart."

"And you will give me the water, then?"

She hesitated; she looked at the ground and then out at the river; and then her eyelids drooped, and there came a sudden flush across her face. It was the second time that Stuart had made her feel conscious. "There, take it, please, and let me go," she said in a low voice; and there was nothing in her tone of the gracious indifference with which she had hitherto spoken to Jack.

Mr. Stuart drank his water very slowly, and looked after her with a well-satisfied smile. "Good Lione, good old dog!" he said, and called the greyhound to him and patted him on the head,—"good old Lione."

"*Qui m'aime aime mon chien*," observed Fanny, watching them from a distance. Major Thayer had studied French for four years at the military academy. So he only opened his eyes and said nothing.

And in this way they saw the Jordan.

For, although it was nearly an hour longer before they ceased to ride along its bank, the thicket had now grown even denser than before; and this was the last sight of the river for many a day. It was with very

different feelings that two of that party were to look at the Jordan again.

But now the path wound through a vast jungle of tall, feathery reeds "shaken by the wind," which shot up high above the horses' heads; and, as they rode along, a wandering gleam of sunshine turned all the yellow plumes into a burning line of gold. And still, as they rode on, the mimosa-trees grew ever farther and farther apart; the stunted, twisted, tamarisk-bushes, still leafless and spotted with the black remains of last year's fruit, disappeared; and again they found themselves traversing a wide reach of plain, green here and there with scanty patches of coarse grass, but for the most part bare even of stones.

It was pleasant to Constance to be once more in the midst of this voiceless calm — a silence as profound, and yet differing in quality from the silence of the desert. She dropped her reins upon her horse's neck, she turned herself carelessly about in her saddle — a gallop was out of the question here, where one dared not lose sight of the escort — and her eyes wandered well pleased from the soft luminous sky overhead, across the undulations of the plain — fawn-colored, or gray, or palest brown, as the cloud-shadows floated slowly by — to the low and vast horizon. And now all the weary look had vanished from her face, and in its stead there had come an expression of deep and quiet satisfaction. For she was singularly sensitive to certain chance combinations of line and color, this girl. Great spaces affected her almost in the same manner as music. In some moods, she would find a sensation almost too keen for pleasure in some perfectly unnoticeable effect of light; although as a general thing she avoided views, and had a perverse dislike to celebrated landscapes and other classified beauties of Nature. Just now all the delicate, shifting effects of a sirocco morning were transfiguring these monotonous plains; and the girl noted with ever-renewed pleasure how every bit of color, each touch of crimson or gold

or blue in scarf or *cufieh*, seemed to accentuate and vivify the day. Long afterwards Constance remembered this as the distinguishing quality of a day made memorable by an indefinite yet all-pervading sense of impending change. But the most important, because the most immediate, result of all this was to make her forget about Jack.

For a moment — it was only for a moment — something in Stuart's words, or face, or action had alarmed her with a sense of oppressive scrutiny. His sudden assertion of independent individuality — this new revelation of his power to insist upon and enforce a request — had perplexed and startled her pride to a degree singularly out of proportion with the triviality of its cause. But it was difficult to measure the full significance of such a silent concession. It was like stooping to pat some favorite dog, and seeing him look up at you with human eyes. It cast a curious, an alarmingly suggestive light upon much which had gone before. But now, as Mr. Stuart fell naturally once more into his usual place beside the palanquin — talking for any length of time to Fanny was calculated to inspire one with a protecting and condescending sense of masculine superiority which was not without its charm — as he rode on beside the palanquin, Constance looked at him earnestly again and again, her face clearing after each furtive examination. Not that she was disposed to undervalue Stuart. On the contrary. He was very kind; handsome; very good-natured. He rode fairly well. And still — Tolerance is not a spontaneous virtue, but rather the final result of disappointment acting upon a noble mind. She filled up the blank with an emphatic smile. The reasons which most potently affect a woman's conduct are, perhaps, the only ones she never puts into words.

But now they came upon a country of low rolling downs; and now the hills grew higher, with steep sides cut away until there was barely room for the cavalcade to pass in single file along their summits; and presently the sheikh, riding on in advance, halted, held up his

hand, wheeled about his horse, then dashed furiously down the stony side of a ravine.

Before them lay a pale and restless sea. The heavy surf broke in dirty yellow foam upon a beach bounded and black with long curving lines of drifted wood — bleached boughs of forest-trees, scattered and heaped like lines of dead men's bones upon this desolate shore. All the foreground was in shadow; but out at sea a ghastly sulphurous light broke through the shifting clouds, turning the water to a dull, deep green. The day had grown oppressively hot, and the white blinding haze on the far-off mountains, the lifeless, enervating wind, the dim sunshine, the slow, sultry splash of the waves, seemed each to add to this oppression.

"I think — I am sorry to keep you waiting, Fanny; but if Jack is going to have a swim, I might as well be making a sketch," said Major Thayer, breaking the silence with a start.

Have I given you any definite idea of Major Thayer? Imagine a tall, loose-jointed, large-boned man of about fifty; a thin man, with an abundance of straight black hair, streaked here and there with gray, and a sort of hard good-nature written all over the shrewd-eyed, resolute face — the type of face you see everywhere in America, on the seat of an express-wagon or on the benches of the Senate. But Major Thayer's life had reached to neither extreme. Some thirty years before the time I write of, young Tom Thayer was one of a class of West Point graduates, whom a paternal government had plied for years with small but constantly repeated doses of French Grammar, Fortifications, and the Higher Mathematics, before sending them out to consider upon these points in the undisturbed seclusion of a frontier post. But as not even four years of daily drill can wholly eradicate all individuality, to these resources against *ennui* young Thayer added the then rather uncommon accomplishment of a pronounced feeling for art, as symbolized by small water-color sketches of undecided merit. And it was this feeling, doubtless, which saved him from

habits whose merit was still more questionable. For thirty years ago the manners and customs of the army officer were not yet above criticism. Whiskey and cards, until one's pay gave out, and then whiskey again, varied by such conversation as might be naturally expected from a party of isolated men, to whom pleasure was limited by their respective powers of drinking, to whom literature was represented by some odd numbers of a sporting novel, and to whom civilization meant the extermination, in a given space of time, of a given number of Indians — such was their commonest formula.

Second-Lieutenant Thayer had entered the United States army with a certain amount of enthusiasm, a determination to distinguish himself speedily, and a confident belief in the rapidity of well-deserved promotion. Of course we all know that private interest has nothing to do with advancement in a well-organized republic; and it is presumable that even in 184— the country had already approximated to its present standard of official integrity. But young Thayer had no influential friends. And sixteen years after entering the service the enthusiasm had somewhat subsided, and Lieutenant Thayer was Lieutenant Thayer of Fort —— still.

Perhaps this may have had something to do with it; perhaps he was only carrying out a long-matured wish of emancipation. In either case, one fine morning he went through his last drill, made out his last report of missing buttons and unregimental ties, shook hands with all his former comrades at the gate, climbed into the army wagon which already held his modest stock of worldly goods, and started for the East.

Perhaps it was the fertility of resource of the native American rather than the eternal fitness of things which was illustrated by his next move; for, three months after this exodus, Mr. Thayer was occupying the chair of Professor (of Belles Lettres, Painting, and Perspective) in a large Presbyterian College for Young Ladies, where tea-drinking took the place of whiskey, and gossip, dress, and religion offered a pleasing change of topic from the

familiar stories of his late companions. He stayed there nearly six months.

It was a piquant enough contrast at the first; but even a contrast need not necessarily be an improvement. I am afraid Mr. Thayer was bored. You see it is quite within the range of possibility that a middle-aged man, with inexpressive eyes and a necktie of the wrong color, may yet be capable of cherishing an ideal which even the most fashionably-dressed young lady of his acquaintance may fail to satisfy. Perhaps the young ladies, on their side, showed but little inclination to discover the secret sentiments of this awkward and silent man, whose embarrassed blushes presented a somewhat startling contrast to their own becoming equanimity. In either case the result was the same; within six months of his arrival at Princetown, Mr. Thayer again sent in his resignation and departed.

He departed somewhat suddenly at the last. Rumor averred that this unexpected haste was somehow connected with an interview of an interesting and strictly private character, which the late professor obtained from one of his youngest and prettiest pupils. But Rumor is a proverbially fallacious goddess, even in the serene exclusion of a female college; and we need hardly credit this report further than we like. Whatever matrimonial disappointment he may have met with, Mr. Thayer's next reappearance was in California, where he remained for some years: a period in his existence which Fanny always vaguely but decidedly referred to as, "The time when my husband was in business" — that elastic phrase which, in a mercantile community, may surely outrival charity in its capacity for covering a multitude of sins. In this case it covered nothing worse than an insurance-office, some experience in the mines, an unlimited quantity of quartz, and a very small one of gold.

It was not until after the close of the Civil War — through which he had passed in a sober, efficient manner — that Mr., now Major, Thayer once more returned to the East; and it was with very different prospects.

For this time the unexpected inheritance of a rather handsome fortune stood him in good stead — a most becoming background to his many excellent traits. At least such was the opinion of Mrs. Van Ness, whom he chanced to meet the very day of his arrival at Nahant, walking upon the sands with a young friend — of Mrs. Van Ness, who needed but one moment to see, remember, go through some rapid mental calculations, and then advance towards him with a perfectly unaffected smile; a cordial greeting; an invitation to dinner.

"For we shall not let you escape us now. It is our turn to do something for you," she said; and here Miss Fanny looked up and smiled. "*Do* let us return a little of what we owe to you — to *all* the brave defenders of our country," said Mrs. Van.

And there must have been something in the phrase which struck the good lady's fancy; for it was with a nearly identical choice of words that, three months later, she presented Major Thayer with her blessing, a set of frail old china, and the hand of her dear young friend.

Unfortunately this opportunity of making a study of Major Thayer's impressions of married life is rendered impossible by a total lack of material. For of the two people most closely concerned in the experiment, one of them was silent with the habit of half a lifetime; and I am under the impression that Mrs. Fanny knew very little about her husband. Certainly she liked him very well; at the first, was even inclined to fascinate him into subjection with all the small and pretty persistencies of a kitten investigating the unknown substance of its ball; but what with one's toilet, one's servants, and one's pastor, the affections must necessarily be limited in their calls upon one's time. After the second year of their marriage, Mrs. Thayer rather neglected these little conjugal coquetries, sagely reflecting, perhaps, that a devotion to society at large certainly included one's own husband to a quite sufficient extent. There were a score of men scattered about the world to whose lips old Tom's name was sure to

bring a ready smile, a cordial word of liking and rough devotion; but to this amiable and demonstrative little woman he called his wife, he soon assumed the place of a secondary providence, whom one might always count upon in an emergency, and — being careful of course to propitiate it from time to time — safely and affably ignore among the minor pleasures of life.

And yet, on the whole, above all, seen in the proper focus of her own comprehension of things, it must be conceded that Fanny behaved pretty well. Just now, for instance, she could scarcely be expected to derive much pleasure from this enforced halt by the Dead Sea; but you would hardly have guessed as much from the facile smile with which she glanced around and beckoned to Constance to draw near.

"You have been so quiet all the morning," she said coaxingly, looking up into her friend's face. "Are you very tired? Very hot? Jack says you have a headache; is it so?"

"Oh — I am quite well," Constance answered, with a quick gesture of dissent.

"Because Jack was afraid you might be overtired."

Miss Varley smiled; opened her lips as if about to speak; thought better of it, and remained silent — gazing absently out at sea.

"You are not going to dismount?"

"It was hardly worth the trouble," the girl answered, hesitating, and then slipped her foot from the stirrup and swung herself lightly down. One of the muleteers was passing; she threw him the reins and went and sat down on the sand, in the shadow of Fanny's palanquin. It seemed even hotter now that they were no longer in movement, and there was nothing to break the silence but the sleepy lapping of the waves.

"The world *is* small after all," said Mrs. Thayer, in a meditative voice, and after a long pause.

"Why so?"

"Oh, I was thinking. I was speaking to Jack about

Morris Stuyvesant this morning. It is curious he should have known —"

"Speaking about Mr. Stuyvesant? Oh, Fanny, how could you do such a thing?" said Constance hastily, biting her underlip and turning very red.

"Well, and why should I not? One must speak of somebody or other. And what harm is there in Mr. Stuyvesant's name, you silly child," cried Fanny, in high good-humor, nestling more luxuriously down amongst her cushions, and smiling affectionately at her friend with half-shut eyes.

And it was precisely this apparent innocence of any ulterior motive which made it so difficult to resent any of Fanny's actions. Somebody said once of Mrs. Thayer, that she was a woman with the nature of a zoöphyte. She was gifted with a positive talent for small, incessant effort; and, like the work of that coral-insect to which she had been likened, there was a wonderful power of cohesion, and hardness, and resistance in all the accumulated mass of these delicate, imperceptible touches. Just now it suited her plans for Constance's benefit — and in point of fact, she was as thoroughly well-intentioned a little woman as you will often find — it suited her plans, I say, to fill all her conversation with a thousand floating, intangible allusions and implications, whose immediate effect was first to embarrass, and then to force the girl into ever closer companionship with Jack.

Miss Varley did not feel particularly interested by young Stuart. This vigorous, energetic young fellow, with his keen enjoyment of life, his shrewd and limited intellect, and his habit of looking at things from their most obvious and common-place side — whose conception of his relation to his fellow-man never rose higher, or went deeper, than an easy-tempered wish that every one might be as comfortable as possible without disturbing any existing arrangements; and whose most independent mental action was the sincere and simple dislike he cherished for any man who did not get along and en-

joy himself without making a row over it — belonged to quite another section of humanity from herself. There was no quality in common between them but their youth; and yet by some fatality circumstances seemed constantly conspiring to bring them closer together.

For example. They had found a lovely spot for their noonday halt — a wild and shadowy ravine, shut in by overhanging rocks — a deep and fragrant resting-place, all redolent with the faint and clinging perfume of the cyclamen. Luncheon was just over, and they were lying about on the grass and fern, glad to escape for an hour from the vision of that colorless, pitiless sky, and all the heat and burden of the outer day.

"Does anybody know what has become of that game-bag?" cried the Major, suddenly looking up from his cigar. "Pass it over here, like a good fellow. I should like to have another look at that last bird you shot."

"Did Jack shoot those partridges? I thought it was the sheikh."

"Oh, no," said Constance, innocently, "it was Jack."

Mrs. Thayer laughed.

"I — I beg your pardon, Mr. Stuart," the girl stammered, turning very pink.

"Why should you? I like it," said Jack, with malicious emphasis.

"Never mind, Constance. 'A rose by any other name,' &c.," suggested the Major, good-naturedly, throwing a chicken-bone to the dog.

"I heard Dr. Adams read that once. It was to try the effect of the new sounding board. I never heard anybody reading Shakspeare like — "

But had Miss Varley quite lost her head in consequence of this last blunder? "I wish Dr. Adams were — in Jericho," she said, with sudden calm audacity. "He belongs to a class of clergymen who are nothing in the world but so many dragomen — spiritual dragomen, I mean. They have the same glib inexactness in their statements about the holiest things — "

"Constance!"

"The same fine indifference to irreconcilable facts," and here she stopped and laughed, and looked demurely defiant at Fanny. "They are equally accustomed to taking people in and doing for them —"

But Mrs. Thayer had assumed an appearance of blank insensibility. She had a rare faculty — which she shared with many women and a particular class of beetles — for effacing herself morally, for becoming at once flat and blind and tenacious at the first symptom of attack.

"It was not difficult," she observed presently, with a suggestion of cold disapproval in air and voice, "it was not difficult to understand from whom these sentiments had taken their origin. A girl's assertions are the merest reflex of what she believes to be the convictions of the man she most admires. And she had observed that ever since Mr. —"

"I beg your pardon for interrupting, but — Lione is eating up all the sardines," said Jack, with happy irrelevance.

It was curious what a repugnance the young man was fast acquiring for even the slightest mention of Mr. Stuyvesant's name.

Not long after that, they began climbing the road to Mar Saba. From time to time a break in the interminable range of hills let through some glimpse of the Dead Sea, now black with storm, now glittering in the sun, or again, as they rose higher above it, of clearest steely blue. And then, leaving the last rounded hillslope at their feet, and as the day was fast drawing to its close, they reached a winding road hewn out in the living rock. Above them towered a huge mass of mountain, so barren, so nakedly barren, that not even the poorest shrub clings to its rocky side; below was the precipice. It is a place where Nature seems flayed alive — dead and desolate and sterile as the lives whose long blind agonies of patience have consecrated these stones. For here, clinging to the side of the ravine, its gray walls a

very part of the gray rocks about them, they came upon the oldest convent in the world — a living tomb, buried in a wilderness, in the name of a religion whose very principle was life.

CHAPTER VII.

STONE WALLS DO NOT A PRISON MAKE.

"WELL, Constance!"

"I say, Miss Varley, what do you think of this for weather?"

"Oh, my dear child, how wet you are! Don't come near me, there's a darling. But you will surely take your death of cold."

"I think," said Miss Varley, gravely, throwing back the hood of her cloak, and making an ineffectual attempt at closing her umbrella, "I think the Deluge was a dry joke in comparison."

And the heavy downpour of the storm upon the canvas roof, the wild gust of wind which blew open the tent-door at that moment, only seemed to add emphasis to the remark.

It had been raining all through the night. It had been raining all the morning. It was already threatening rain the day before as they rode away from the almond orchards encompassing about the gray old walls of Bethlehem with a triple crown of pale and fragrant bloom. They were camping now at Bethel, their tents pitched on the grass-grown bottom of an ancient reservoir, which to-day's storm seemed fast restoring to its original purpose.

"Him one very bad look-out — very bad look-out for the ladies, sir," said Hassan, taking off his fez with an air of great despondency.

The men had been at work since dawn digging a

trench about the encampment, and already a thin treacherous stream was creeping in beneath the sodden canvas, and settling in little yellow pools about each table and chair.

Towards noon there came a slight break in the clouds. Jack took up his hat and lit a cigar. "I can't stand this any longer," he said, and went out. When he returned an hour later, the rain was pouring down harder than ever, and he himself was stained with mud from head to foot. There was a kind of village, a dozen Arab huts or so, higher up on the hill, he explained, and he had met one of the natives, an old man, who offered to show him a newly-discovered tomb. "He said no one had ever been inside it but himself, an Englishman, and two dogs. I thought I might as well add my name to the list, particularly as the place is not yet down in 'Murray.'"

"And you saw nothing inside?"

"Nothing but mud."

"You should not try to bring away all you see, Mr. Stuart," said Constance, with a smile.

But it must be admitted that the situation was assuming a dreary aspect.

"I remember just such a storm one night on the Plains in '59," Major Thayer remarked as they sat down to dinner; and a singularly incoherent repast it proved to be, brought in by relays of dripping servants from the kitchen-tent across the way. "Shall I give you some of this chicken, Fanny, or will you wait for the soup?"

And, as he spoke, there came a sudden gust of wind that seized upon the tent, shaking it violently from side to side.

"There goes the table. Mind your fingers, Constance!" said Stuart, with a reckless laugh.

And the next moment there came a long, tearing crash, a shriek from Fanny, struggling in her arm-chair with the foldings of her plaid, a quick snapping of cords and flapping of wet canvas, and then the night and the

storm seemed rushing in upon them. The wind had blown over the tent.

It was only a moment of course, before the men had got it up again. But now, indeed, things were beginning to look serious.

"It is very bad, I am afraid very dam bad for my ladies, sir," said Hassan, with respectful regret. "Beds all wet; tent full of water —"

The men were hammering all around them at the pegs.

"Those pins can never hold in this soft earth if the wind rises again," said Stuart.

There was a moment's pause. Fanny had hidden her head among the cushions; Miss Varley was standing beside her, holding her hand, and looking anxiously at the different speakers in turn. The cold had grown intense.

"Perhaps ——. It seems to me that I do not hear the rain," she said.

Major Thayer went to the doorway and looked out. He drew his head in again with a sudden exclamation. "I thought it was coming," he said, quietly; and held out his arm for them to see. The sleeve of his coat was all white with freshly-fallen snow.

It was dark by this time, and Paolo was making an ineffectual attempt at lighting the candles.

"Why don't you bring in the lantern?" said Jack.

The insufficient light seemed to make their forlornness more complete, and Fanny moaned feebly at sight of the situation it revealed.

But half an hour later, perhaps, Mrs. Thayer was too dismayed to moan. She was clinging with both arms around the neck of a stalwart Syrian, muffled in sheepskins, and looking like a brigand, who with bent head and cautious footsteps was picking his way among the stones and bog towards the shelter of the village. The white drifts of snow only gave greater value to the darkness; the driving sleet dashed in her face whenever she lifted it to look about her; the wind was growing wilder

with the falling night; and now, in surplus of horror, her guide was ascending a steep and slippery path, and beginning to pant and stagger beneath his load.

But now, surely, the worst of it was over. They had passed up a narrow stair, and in under a low stone archway; and now Fanny found herself gently sliding to the earth. Before her was a small vaulted enclosure, bare and absolutely empty of any furniture but a roll of bedding hastily flung upon the ground. The room was full of smoke, and at its farther end she saw a fire, and Constance crouching down before it warming her hands. It was very dreary certainly, but they had had to turn out a whole family to get even that.

"And Hassan is delighted. He says it is one very much better place than he expected to find," said Miss Varley, looking up with a laugh.

It was a wretched evening at the best. The narrow room was barely large enough to hold the four mattresses and leave a small clear space before the fire. It was impossible to stand; the smoke was too thick to allow them to sit up for more than a few moments at a time; and if the door was opened — window there was none — a quick white drift of snow came whirling in across the floor.

"I think I begin to discern some of the minor advantages of civilization," remarked the Major, grimly.

Once, towards morning, Constance awoke. The air had grown very chill. The room was still full of a thin blue haze, but the fire was blazing brightly, and Stuart was standing before the hearthstone piling on more wood. At the slight sound she made, raising herself up upon her elbow, he turned his head, saw her eyes open and watching him, and smiled.

"I think the wind is falling. It is not snowing now," he said in a whisper.

"It is so cold!"

"Come and warm yourself by the fire. Wait; I will make you a seat."

He dragged a rug from off his bed, rolled it up and

threw it down upon the floor. "There; sit there," he said.

She came slowly forward, smiling — a tall slim figure — gathering up the long, dark folds of her habit in both hands. Her face was all warm and rosy with sleep, like the face of a little child.

"You look about six years old," said Stuart.

"Hush! You will wake them up."

She sat down before the fire, blinking a little, and putting up her hand to shade her eyes from the light. They began talking together in whispers.

"Is it late?"

"Half-past three."

"I wish I could see if it had stopped snowing."

"Oh, you can look if you like. I have found a way to open the door."

"Hush!" said Constance, with her finger to her lip.

They listened a moment.

"No. Poor Fanny was awfully tired. I don't think you would wake her easily," said Jack.

They both rose, and began moving cautiously towards the door. Presently Miss Varley caught her foot in the long folds of her dress and stumbled against the mattress. Jack seized hold of her arm. "Be careful," he said; and then Mrs. Thayer sighed heavily, twice, and stirred in her sleep. They held their breath. Was she awaking? No, it was nothing. Mr. Stuart turned to his companion with a comical smile of relief. He was still standing with his hand upon her arm, and so close to her that he could see her eyes shining in the firelight; he could feel her breath coming quicker with stifled laughter.

"Come on!"

They crept to the door, and Jack opened it noiselessly, an inch at a time.

"There is only a narrow ledge outside there. Mind you don't slip off the step."

The night was very still and cold. They were looking out across a wide plain; the air was full of a strange

uncertain light, reflected from the snow. It was a starless night; the sky was broken and full of movement: one felt, rather than saw, the ceaseless, tumultuous unrest of the wind-vexed clouds. It had stopped snowing; only now and then a large flake floated slowly down and fell upon Miss Varley's upturned face. They were standing under the shelter of a small stone archway, built over the door. Beside them was a second stairway leading to the roof. Constance laid both her hands upon this parapet, leaning farther out. She shivered.

"You are cold. Give me your hand again; I am so afraid you will fall," the young man said in a whisper.

The fingers he took in his were burning hot. There was something strangely magnetic in their careless touch. He felt his own pulse quicken — a sense of confused pleasure which sent the blood pulsating faster through his veins.

"I wish she would say something — I hope she will not go away," he thought.

"You see — I mean — it is not snowing any more," he said aloud, with an effort.

"I beg your pardon. But the wind blows all your words away. I did not hear — "

"I — Oh, it was nothing." And then, after a pause: "Miss Varley!"

"Well?"

"I wish you would tell me something."

"Tell you what?" she said again, after waiting a moment.

What was he going to ask her? Perhaps he hardly knew it himself. But as he hesitated they heard the wind rising far down beneath them in the valley, the dark mass of clouds overhead was rent asunder with sudden force, and for one instant, through their trailing edges, appeared the pallid disk of the pale storm-troubled moon; and in another second the darkness closed about them, the bitter blast swept in long gusty sighs over the field of snow. As Constance turned her

face towards him the wind caught in her long and loosened hair, and blew it full across his lips.

They both laughed; they both turned with a common impulse to seek once more the shelter of the room. But Miss Varley was fast asleep — she had been calmly asleep for hours — before he could free himself from the memory of that clinging, silken touch.

The next morning broke cold and dark. A wild white storm was raging among the hills, and now the heavy, noiseless fall of snow was interrupted by fierce intervals of hail and sleet. Unfortunately, they had all awakened early. Indeed, they had had but little inducement to prolong their sleep; still less, perhaps, to face the uncompromising length of all those smoke-filled hours. For in their hurried exodus of the night before it now appeared no one had contemplated the possibility of a lengthened imprisonment.

Their resources against *ennui* were singularly few, and consisted chiefly in cigars, a small pocket Bible, and a fragmentary pack of cards — the two latter a contribution from the dragoman. Perhaps there was something in the very incongruity of the gift which served as its antidote; it may be that even euchre requires a mind unhampered by preoccupation; certainly Mr. Stuart was the first to throw up his hand, the first to declare that the game was not a success. And although there was a certain satisfaction in knowing this was Bethel, although they had been nearly drowned upon the very spot where Jacob slept and dreamed, still it was really snowing too hard for one to care for Jeroboam.

Historical associations were all very well in their place. "You need not laugh, Tom! I'm sure there is not one of you more interested in sacred geography than myself; but, oh, it was dreadful how one missed one's four-o'clock tea," Mrs. Thayer remarked, with a yawn.

"And yet it might have been worse, you know," Constance suggested cheerfully, looking up from one of the desultory attempts at amateur cookery with which they

tried to diversify the day. "When you are anxious not to have your chocolate burn, Mr. Stuart, you should keep your eyes on the fire, and not be watching me. It might have been worse, Fanny, after all," Miss Varley said.

"How?"

"We might have been here with Aunt Van!"

Major Thayer laughed. There *are* limits to human endurance, he objected, dryly, however little Constance might take the fact into account.

And "Oh, of course. It is well known that poor Mrs. Van Ness can never do any thing to please Tom," his wife remarked, with a sigh.

"What! Not when she introduced me to you, my dear?" he asked, with perfect good-humor.

Miss Varley smiled. Her earliest recollection of her aunt was a peculiar one, she observed, turning to Stuart. It dated back years and years ago, to the time when Mr. Van Ness was still alive. Mr. Van Ness had been extremely handsome. "My father remembers him as quite a young man, and very proud of his complexion and hair; but when we children knew him he had been injured in a railway accident. They told us he had been all patched together, and we used to spend whole hours watching him in the hope he might come undone," Constance added, with a laugh. "But the first time I saw them my father had taken me down to The Cottage with him — perhaps as a palliative; for he had gone there with bad news about the marriage of one of our cousins. I remember Aunt Van sitting on one side of him, holding his hand and sobbing: 'Oh, my dear Henry, if she marries an unbeliever, think — think of her immortal soul!' and Uncle Van on the other side: 'Bother her soul, Henry; has the man means? What means has the man got? Bother his soul!'"

"And, oh Constance, have you forgotten Miss Wallace? Miss Wallace is one of Aunt Van's *protégées*, Jack —"

"She really is very good, you know."

"One of her *protégées* — a thin little woman, with a long thin neck, and faded eyes and ringlets. In the afternoon she puts on a black silk apron, and sits in her little garden under a rose-tree, watching the hens and reading Miss Porter's 'Scottish Chiefs.' She is poor — oh, wretchedly poor! — but she traces her pedigree back to Sir William Wallace; and about twice a year she gets a letter from a cousin who sends her money. She calls that 'a communication from the family.'"

Miss Varley had remarked as a curious fact that, when by any chance there has been a great man in any family, his descendants seem to pride themselves upon getting as far away from him as possible.

"Yes; but I must tell Jack about Aunt Van," said Fanny, laughing. "You see, she had taken a great fancy to a particular dentist in New York — Aunt Van is always taking particular fancies — and nothing would satisfy her but giving the man a trial. She could not go herself — perhaps she did not care to; so what does she do but send poor Miss Wallace, with strict orders to have all her teeth drawn out and an entirely new set put in — at Aunt Van's expense. 'It will be such a comfort to you, my dear, when it is all over,' Aunt Van told her, patting her on the shoulder. 'But, dear Mrs. Van Ness, I have never had a toothache in my life!' 'The very reason you should take precautions. There, my dear, there; we 'll say nothing more about it,' says Aunt Van, patting her again. And the poor thing actually had it done. It made her very ill, I remember, and Mrs. Van used to go down and look at her, and tell her how thankful she ought to be to think it was all over. But she has always been especially fond of Miss Wallace to this day."

Mr. Stuart laughed. "I should like to see her."

"Oh, it is not unlikely. We left her at Naples; but there was some talk of her joining us at Damascus before we left."

"Now, heaven forbid!" ejaculated the Major, with edifying fervor.

"What! afraid of her are you, Tom? And you, Miss Varley, are you one of the victims too?" said Jack.

There was certainly something peculiar about Mr. Stuart that day. He had hardly spoken to Constance twice since morning, and yet the girl was constantly aware of his attentive and persistent glance. "And you, Miss Varley, are you afraid of her too?" he asked.

"Oh, I like Aunt Van — in a fashion. I have known her all my life; and she is really very kind-hearted if you only agree with her."

Major Thayer shook his head dubiously, making some confidential remark to his cigar.

"Well, I frankly admit it — if Constance is not afraid of her, I am," said Fanny, laughing. "But that is one of the advantages of being small: you are not expected to be uncomfortably brave."

But Mr. Stuart questioned the sentiment. The Major went still farther — he denied it.

"The pluckiest man I ever knew," he said deliberately, "was a quiet, delicate-looking little fellow, and not much to look at, any way. It was quite at the end of the war. He was with the Sanitary Commission people at first, and then in the hospitals. Wouldn't fight because he was half a Southerner by birth, and had some kind of scruple about it; but he knew the country, and if ever there was a bit of dangerous reconnoitering to be done, it was Lawrence who volunteered."

"Lawrence? What Lawrence? You don't mean Denis Lawrence, surely?" said Mrs. Thayer.

Miss Varley started. She got up suddenly, and began collecting the cards scattered over the floor.

Yes; Major Thayer meant Denis Lawrence.

"Why, you knew him, Jack. You must have seen him. Wasn't he at The Farm three years ago, the winter you were there?"

Jack recollected him perfectly. He had never exchanged more than a dozen words with Mr. Lawrence. Fanny would remember he left the day of Mr. Stuart's arrival.

"Well, Constance remembers him at any rate."

Miss Varley was building a card house. This is a delicate operation, requiring a steady hand and undivided care. Perhaps this was the reason her answer came with some reluctance. "Yes, I remember him," she said.

"Once — it was in the times of Mosby's raids, all the country was upside down, and the niggers coming into camp every day, each one with a different story — he started out to do a little scouting. Deuced bad weather it was, raining as it only rains in Virginia, and go where he would there wasn't a gray-coat to be seen. He was coming back. He had stopped to get some supper in a cabin, when the old darky comes running in: 'Look out, massa! Massa Mosby comin' up to the door!' Lawrence runs to the window; and, by Jove! there was Mosby himself, and a dozen of his men, riding in at the gate. The house was one of those one-room Southern shanties, built in a clearing, with a wood-pile at the back. Since our fellows came so near trapping him at the Corner, Mosby was always precious careful not to get caught without a sentry again; so he posts his men about the house, and comes in just as Lawrence swings himself out of the back window and on top of the wood. — But, Constance, I am sure I have told you this story before?"

"Oh, please go on," said Miss Varley, very quickly. Her card house had fallen to pieces at her feet. She was sitting with her hands clasped tightly together; and Mr. Stuart noted with wonder, with admiration, perhaps even with a certain instinctive and unreasoning jealousy, the rapt excitement transfiguring her face.

"Well, the guerillas were in high spirits and made a night of it. Twice they sent men out to bring in more wood, and Lawrence felt them dragging the logs out from under his pile, and heard them swearing at the rain. Just before dawn they fired the cabin, 'to teach that d———d nigger to give gentlemen a better supper another time,' and rode away. But the point of the

story is that some one asked Denis afterwards what he was thinking of while he was there in hiding. 'Oh,' says Lawrence — you know his quiet way of speaking — 'it was raining so hard, and I take cold so easily, I was wishing I had thought to bring an umbrella.'"

A pause.

"By-the-way, this Mr. Lawrence is a Catholic, isn't he?" said Jack, suddenly, with an air of great unconcern.

"Oh, yes; his mother was a Catholic, you know. His mother was a Miss De Bray, from Virginia. The De Brays are all Roman Catholics, but I daresay Mr. Lawrence —"

Miss Varley found it impossible to imagine any reason which should prevent Mr. Lawrence from belonging to any form of religion he preferred; still, as a matter of fact — "I remember his telling me once that, to him, the mind of a modern convert to the Catholic Church was like the walled-up window of a house. The outline of the window was preserved, but serving as a repository for rubbish instead of a passage for light."

"Would you mind saying that over again? I am afraid I did not quite understand the idea," said Jack.

Fanny looked at him with unaffected wonder. There must surely be something abnormal in any set of circumstances so evidently disturbing to Mr. Stuart's equanimity.

It may be that the young man is aware of it himself.

"Confound that snow. I — I think I shall go out for a little while, and see what Hassan has been doing with those horses," he says presently, and he goes out with a stride and the door closes behind him.

Fanny has had time to fall asleep before he returns, but Constance — Miss Varley — is sitting in precisely the same attitude, and still playing with her cards. It has grown into a wonderful erection by this time, that pasteboard castle at her feet. And Mr. Stuart stands beside it, and looks at the young architect with a sufficiently peculiar expression.

"I — Fanny is asleep you know, and it would be a

pity to wake her up; but I thought — It has stopped snowing," says this considerate young man, "the clouds are all blowing away. Put on your cloak and come up on the terrace and see the sunset," he suggests.

What a charming idea! Miss Varley is on her feet in a moment. A sunset, the fresh air — what could be pleasanter? "Where is your hat, Tom? Do find your hat. Has Mr. Stuart seen the Major's hat?"

"It — There is a good bit of snow on the ground," Mr. Stuart remarks, "and if the Major has any fear of taking cold — "

"But how am *I* to go out, then?" cries somebody else in great perplexity. "I have only these boots — "

It is a very pretty little foot Miss Varley holds out for inspection, and Mr. Stuart doubtless is not unaware of the fact.

"I — don't — think you will get your boots wet," the young man says, looking very foolish; "the fact is, I thought you might like to go up there. And there wasn't much snow on the steps. And so — "

"And so somebody has been spending his time clearing it off?" cries out the Major, with a laugh. "Certainly you cannot do less than accept such primitive marks of good-will from — from the natives. Go, my dear Constance, go; it will do you good. But if you will excuse me, I think I shall remain indoors, and — and take care of my rheumatism, as Jack suggested."

And so presently these young people take their departure. And presently Mrs. Thayer wakes up — takes her head from out the cushions, that is to say — and looks about her with a very sprightly air.

"Yes, they have gone. They went while you were sleeping, my dear," says the Major, eying his wife rather curiously.

"Oh, they have gone, have they?" remarks that lady, with great satisfaction. "Well, let us hope dear Constance won't catch cold."

"Let us hope dear Constance won't — won't catch

the rheumatism, while we are about it," says Tom, with another queer smile.

"Catch the rheumatism? Catch the fiddlestick!" cries Fanny, with great decision. "Jack is a dear, good fellow. I was always fond of Jack."

"Oh, so am I — uncommonly. And, as you were saying, Jack has a very good business head; and when his father dies he will come into a very pretty income, no doubt. And — and dear Aunt Van will be so pleased at your marrying off Constance after her own failure in that line."

It is decidedly dark in this smoky little chamber, but I think there is no doubt that Fanny blushes at this juncture.

"Have I ever said a word about marrying off Constance?" she demands with some trepidation.

"Never, my dear, never! Let me do you the justice to say you have never mentioned it. And I don't think you ever spoke to me much about that pretty Miss Schuyler Jack was so infatuated with last year. Last year? Stop! I think it was only this spring. But you should know, Fanny; you keep a better account of the boy's flirtations than I."

"I — I 'm sure I don't know what you mean," says Fanny, still more meekly. It was so seldom Major Thayer took the trouble to put his observations into words, his wife was apt to treat them with the kind of respect one accords to a powder-magazine. There was no means of estimating what an explosion of all her little devices might be impending. "I 'm sure I don't know what you mean," says Fanny. "I don't see what there was to laugh at in Jack's way of coming for her. I thought it was very pretty myself."

"I thought you were asleep, my love," says the Major, taking out his cigar-case.

"At all events, Jack is your own cousin — your own cousin, remember, and not a relative of mine," says Mrs. Thayer, with great dignity; "and I think you might — I mean, I think —" She hesitated, she looked up,

she laughed, and laid her pretty head against her husband's arm. "Don't interfere, there 's a dear good old Tom," she said coaxingly.

"*I* interfere? You are quite right in mapping out your friends' careers for them, my dear child; you certainly are a very remarkable judge of character. *I* interfere with Master Jack's amusements? Not if I know it," said the Major, grimly. "Jack is my cousin, you say? Very well. I don't know that there is any thing in that fact to prevent his being a young idiot as well. For Constance won't marry him. Constance, let me tell you, has no desire to go and live in the streets of Gath. You cannot bribe her with a country house in Ascalon —"

"Ascalon! Gath!" Mrs. Fanny protested she had not an idea what the Major could mean.

"I mean — by George! — I mean that our cousin is a young Philistine, my dear. An honest, good-looking, stupid young Philistine, with no more chance of ever evolving an idea from that handsome head of his than I have of being made Prime Minister. I mean that Constance has more in her little finger than that good-natured young donkey in all his brain. I mean that Jack had better stick to leading cotillons, and flirting with the Schuyler girls, and putting his father's money into circulation for the next five years at least; and Constance —"

"Constance is quite old enough to know her own mind — quite," said Miss Varley's friend, with some impatience. "But, Tom" (she put her other hand upon her husband's shoulder), "don't interfere, dear Tom. Let things take their own course, that 's all I ask of you," she said.

Major Thayer was in the habit of accepting his wife's caresses with much philosophy. "All right. Only let me light my cigar in peace," he answered good-humoredly. "If Jack doesn't make a young fool of himself to please you, you may be sure that Tom or Dick or Harry will. A man can only be young once. Let the boy enjoy himself while he can. He 'll come upon his

troubles fast enough — and come out of them, too. Men have died and worms have eaten them, but not for love," remarked this ex-Professor.

"I don't see how that applies to Jack," said Fanny, with mild persistence.

But, for my part, I fancy the Major was not referring to Jack.

CHAPTER VIII.

ON THE HOUSE-TOP.

AT first she would speak of nothing but the view. "It was a joy, oh, such a joy, to breathe this air!" she said. She threw back the hood of her cloak; she leaned her arms upon the parapet; she looked down into the valley. The desolation of the winter was about them. Here and there a thin blue fillet of smoke rose steadily up through the windless afternoon, and here and there the brown walls of a house stood clear of the drifted snow.

The thaw had begun; the air was full of its faint whisperings — the gurgling sound and the stir of running water.

"I can't understand why you should look so happy to-night," said Stuart, presently, leaning forward and looking up into her face; "what are you smiling to yourself about? You look," said the young man, suspiciously, "you look like a person who has heard good news."

Constance laughed. "Well — you have just told me we should get away to-morrow," she answered evasively; but she had the grace to blush as she spoke.

"I — I dreamed about you last night," said Jack, looking away again and digging his stick into the snow.

"Did you?"

"It was a nice — an extremely nice dream."

"Indeed," said Miss Varley, very gravely, opening her blue eyes to their widest extent; "indeed!"

"And — I say, Miss Varley — Constance — I wonder if you would mind if I should call you Constance?"

"Mind it? No!"

"What! really not?"

"Really not. Why should I? If it gives you any pleasure, call me so by all means. And then, you know, when one remembers the example I set you the other day —"

"But you've never called me by my name since — not once," says Mr. Stuart, eagerly.

"Haven't I? How very neglectful I am to be sure!" says Miss Constance, beginning to laugh again.

She is always laughing at him, Mr. Stuart thinks savagely; and perhaps the young man's face expresses some of the discomfiture he feels, for presently:

"Have I really vexed you? I am so sorry. Indeed, I did not mean to. But after all that smoke I think this fresh air must be going to my head!" somebody says, with the utmost friendliness. "Come, Mr. Stuart — come Jack" — and here a dogskin gauntlet is held out to him — "forgive me, and shake hands, and make friends — won't you?" says the owner of the glove.

Forgive her! make friends! Mr. Stuart is ready to — to — In fact, you know he is ready —

Perhaps it is quite as well for the duration of the present peace that he is too much occupied in digging holes in the snow with his stick to look up as he makes the foregoing statements, and see the frank surprise, the mischievous amusement that fill the blue eyes by his side.

But it is not to be supposed that such an event as the imprisonment of a whole company of backshish-giving *howadji* could pass unnoticed in an Arab village. We may be sure that many a pair of dark, intent eyes have been observing the proceedings of these two young people from the neighboring roofs.

"Look! there is a man at his prayers," says Constance, pointing with her hand, and then falls silent, watching the tall figure rising and bowing — a dusky shape against the winter twilight. There is always a certain suggestion of melancholy in a figure seen thus — a black silhouette against a fading sky — no longer an individual man, but a mere fraction of humanity half-hidden in the gathering shadows. It is Nature's revenge upon man's daytime supremacy — a transfiguration in which all the commonplace of appearance and existence disappear, are lost in the great mystery of coming night. The last wan line of crimson dies away behind the hills; here and there a star is shining in the pale, cold blue of the sky.

"I should like to know what you are thinking of," says Jack, breaking a longer silence than has ever fallen between them before.

Thinking of? Miss Varley looks up at him with somewhat wistful eyes.

"I was thinking of an old ballad I knew once," she says slowly, beginning to count the amber beads about her wrist as she speaks; it is a familiar action of hers, and one that betokens some inward perturbation. "An old German ballad. I knew some one who — I mean, I have heard it sung. Perhaps you know it. '*Schön-Rohtraut.*' It is Schumann's music. I cannot tell you who wrote the words."

"Oh, I should probably be not much the wiser if you did," says Jack simply. "You know I never did care much for books."

And, indeed, this was quite true. Mr. Stuart's relation to literature being not unlike that of a Newfoundland dog to the water.

He could acquit himself quite creditably while in this unfamiliar element; might even secure some small waif or stray not too heavy to float, to which his attention had been especially directed; and, once on dry land again (so to speak), you may be sure he lost no time in shaking off the last vestiges of his late exploit.

"I did not know you cared for German songs," he says.

"I care for this one."

"Why?"

"I see Hassan bringing up the dinner. I can see Abdallah's smile from this distance," remarks Miss Varley, calmly, in answer to this last demand.

And this, I protest, is a full, a faithful account of the momentous interview upon which Fanny had based so many hopes.

But would Fanny believe it? She greets her friend with her most innocent smile. They have kept dinner waiting? Not a bit of it! Fanny likes to have dinner wait. She is sure the air has done Constance good. Jack was so very right not to let the Major expose himself. Dear Tom cannot be too careful.

"Dear Tom can very easily be too hungry, though," says the Major with a grin.

"I am very sorry. I knew we should be late. But I could not get Jack to come down," says Miss Varley, simply.

"Dear Constance!" Mrs. Thayer goes up and embraces her friend with artless effusion; "my dear Constance!"

"Pray, don't let me hurry you. What is dinner in comparison to the affections?" says the Major, again eying this group.

"Dinner, Fanny! and Tom shall tell us some of his army stories at dessert. Tom has developed wonderfully of late," cries Constance, gaily; "I 'm sure I never knew him to be so interesting before."

And this time Mrs. Thayer does not offer any embrace.

When they leave Bethel, a feeble sun is struggling through the morning mist. At first the road they follow leads them across a field of stones, a plain of scattered ruins buried in the half-melted snow; and then, for a mile or two, their path is the broken bed of a mountain torrent, where the sure-footed Syrian horses scramble

and poise like goats upon the massive boulders, or splash, knee deep, through sudden icy pools. And now they have reached a lower level, where rain, not snow, has fallen through the storm. There is a stirring of color among the hedgerows, a gleam of scarlet anemones, a flash of yellow butter-cups, some hint of hidden sweetness from a starry clematis-vine. As they go down, lower and lower, dry spots and sheltered nooks appear. At midday they stop for luncheon at the Robber's Fountain — a high, gray cliff towering above three brimming basins of hollowed stone, and all overgrown with delicate drooping fern and frail white tufts of cyclamen.

And now the road grows wider, and winds past endless orchards of shadowy olive-trees; gray-green as a mass, shivering into sharpest silvery light as the wind stirs in their branches. Then a long reach of pale young wheat "springing out of the earth clear shining after the rain," so tender, its color is steel-blue in the sunshine, deepening to rings of greenest emerald where, here and there, an olive stands amongst the grain and casts its shadow on the ground. At every step the terraced hills sink lower, the valley opens farther out before them. A hundred new born flowers look joyously up from out the grass; birds are calling to each other from the shelter of the small young leaves; a weak wind is chasing the light cloud-shadows faster across the plain; it seems the very resurrection of the spring!

"Do you see that village over there? That is Shiloh," says Constance, pointing with her whip. "Jack, if you will ride up to Fanny and tell her that is Shiloh, I will bet you a pair of gloves she mentions Dr. Adams's famous sermon about the Infant Samuel three times within the next fifteen minutes!"

"Why do you so dislike poor Dr. Adams?" says Mr. Stuart, reproachfully.

"I don't dislike him; he bores me; he is a big man who is always making feeble puns and jokes — mild, clerical jokes, don't you know, with a musty, flabby

feeling about them, as though he kept them in the same barrel with his sermons."

"I wish — I really do wish you would not say such things," says Jack, with sudden gravity.

"What things? and why not?"

"Oh, laughing at people, and so on. I never heard my mother or my sister laugh at a clergyman in my life," he says in a very positive manner. And then there is a long silence. Miss Varley is looking at the hedgerows with an inquiring air; Mr. Stuart is watching her face.

"You — you are not angry?" he asks presently, riding up closer to her as he speaks. "Constance, you are not angry? I would not offend you for the world!"

Miss Varley is not offended in the least; in fact, does not see why she should be — and says so, with exasperating calm.

"And you will give up the habit — for my sake?"

"Oh, if I had such a habit, and there was any harm in it — which, mind you, I don't admit — and if I gave it up for anybody it would certainly be to please Fanny," Miss Varley answers, carelessly enough.

"And you would not do it for me?" He rests his hand upon the neck of her horse, and half checks his own, and looks down into her face. They are riding in a narrow, sunken lane, across which a branching fig-tree casts the dappled shadow of its small young leaves. As they slacken their pace, Lione comes bounding back and looks up at them and whines and rubs his golden-brown head against Miss Varley's horse.

"You won't do it for my sake, Constance?" says Jack. It makes a very pretty group, seen from the palanquin.

She lifted her face up suddenly and looked at him straight in the eyes. Once before he had seen this same expression of distress, of defiance in her glance. "I wish you would speak of something else," she says bravely, but with a palpable effort.

"I will do as you like," the young man answered simply.

They rode on for nearly a mile without another word.

The camp that night was in the plain of Labban. A hundred feet away from the tent-door a little spring bubbled up amongst the fern-grown ruins of an ancient khan. Farther on, a long green reach of meadow-land was dotted with feeding herds — big, brown-skinned cattle — guarded by brown-cloaked Bedawy.

It was a simple and patriarchal scene; and after dinner, as they sat in the doorway of the tent, drinking coffee, it was pleasant to see these strange and savage figures sitting motionless in the last level rays of the sun, or leaning upon their spears, watching their flocks by night.

"That village we passed this afternoon was Shiloh," Fanny remarked, after a while. "Did you know it? I wish some one had told me of it sooner, for Dr. Adams — "

Jack laughed involuntarily, and looked over at Miss Varley. She was sitting on the grass, playing with Lione's ears as he rested his head on her lap. There was something very gentle, very subdued in her manner that evening. She hardly spoke. Once or twice as Jack looked up, he felt her eyes fixed upon him. There was a singular seriousness, something almost melancholy in their glance.

"Are you tired, child?" asks Fanny, presently, leaning back in her chair.

"Very."

"I 'm sure I don't wonder at it! That constant riding is so fatiguing. Even I, with my palanquin, am quite used up. I don't want to disturb you, Jack, but if you would hand me that cushion — thanks. And there was another little one. Constance is leaning on it? Oh, I didn't see," says Mrs. Thayer, sweetly.

"Oh, take it, Fanny. Lione will do for a pillow quite as well," the girl answers, laughing; and, as she speaks, the dragoman appears majestically smoking a chibouque, and asks for a few words with Miss Varley.

There is a moment's consultation, and then they see

Constance walking hurriedly away in the direction of the kitchen-tent. Presently Luigi comes running back to fetch a box.

"What is it?" Fanny asks, with languid interest.

"My lady want her medicine, lady. One man very bad hurt," says Luigi, with the box under his arm.

It was so like Constance! She was always doing these ridiculous things. It was just the same way on the Nile; they used to come to her if any one scratched his finger.

"As for me, I told Hassan from the very first I was not to be disturbed about the men's accidents. My nerves will not bear it. It is a question of health with me," says Fanny.

"It is a question of health — other people's health — with Constance," Major Thayer remarks, placidly.

"Oh, Constance has always had a mania for sacrificing herself. It was exactly the same way at school. They used to call her Don Quixote; she had such ridiculous fancies about things, not a bit like the other girls. She was almost the youngest there; but I think they were all a little afraid of her, all except me. Constance can be very severe over any thing she thinks dishonorable; and proud — proud as Lucifer — if you take her the wrong way. But I always knew how to manage her. There is nothing she would not do for me," said Fanny, complacently. She settled herself more comfortably back in her chair, and glanced round at Jack. "Do call that dog away. I can't endure to have him touch me," she said.

"Were you — come here, Lione! — were you long at school with Constance?" says Mr. Stuart, bending down to examine the dog's collar.

"Always. That is — I left before she did, of course; but we have been together since we were babies. You know Captain Varley was my guardian. I remember," said Mrs. Thayer, pensively, "I remember the last term before I left school for good," with a glance at the Major; "there was a girl we all hated: Walker her

name was — Mary Walker. I think she was a cousin or something of the principal, and they had her there for charity. She was an ugly, shabby little creature, anyhow, and we none of us would speak to her. She was in training to be a governess — reading for a French prize — we could not understand how it was she took so many honors, for she was a very stupid girl, until one day, quite by accident, Constance saw her copying her exercises out of some old book. It was Constance's own work, I believe; something she had done for her amusement. That was one of the queerest things about Constance; she absolutely studied, to amuse herself — "

"Well?" said Mr. Stuart. It may be he too was wondering in a simple way over this last announcement.

"Well! the end of it was very characteristic, certainly. First, she made the Walker girl swear she would abandon her evil courses — as though that were likely! but Constance is so credulous. And then she stayed over Christmas week in town — you remember that Christmas week at Aunt Van's, Tom? — she stays over all through the Christmas holidays to coach that wretched creature through her grammar. She got her diploma, I know, and after that they gave her a salary, and her aunt made more of her. But I don't think she ever thanked Constance."

"Don't you think it is time some one went to see what has become of Miss Varley?" said Jack, and went out without waiting for an answer.

It had grown dark meanwhile. There was a leaping fire in front of the kitchen-tent; a circle of muleteers stood around it, their shadows stirring curiously upon the canvas wall at every motion of the wind-blown flames. The young man sauntered up to the group, and looked in. Miss Varley was kneeling upon the ground; Hassan was standing near her holding a lighted torch. She had pushed the sleeve of her habit back over her white arm; there was a sponge and a basin of

water by her side. As Jack drew near, she was already binding up the injured foot with a firm, dexterous touch.

"Ask him if that feels more comfortable, Hassan," she said. "If it does not feel more comfortable, I will do it all over again." She looked up at her patient with the sweetest, the most compassionate smile.

"*Taïb, Abdallah?*"

"*Taïb, ketir!*" said the man, with a quick lighting up of the wrinkled, anxious face.

A broad, white smile flashed responsively around the dusky ring of lookers-on.

"That Bedawy — the one with the child — is to have some of that ointment to rub on his shoulder, Hassan," said Miss Varley, getting up to her feet and pulling down her sleeve. And then, for the first time, she was aware of Stuart.

"What was the matter?"

"Oh, it was only that unlucky old Abdallah. He is always getting hurt. This time a mule stepped on his foot. I hope Hassan will remember not to make him walk to-morrow. I must get up early and see about it before the train starts off," she said thoughtfully. And then, after a moment's pause: "Considering that I never tied up as much as a cut finger before we went to Egypt, and that I have unlimited control of Fanny's medicine-chest, don't you think I ought to be congratulated that so many of my patients escape with their lives, Mr. Stuart?" she added, laughing.

"I think that you are an angel of goodness — to everybody but me," said Jack.

They had adopted very early hours here in Syria. Breakfast was on the table punctually at six o'clock, and as a usual thing the lights were all out in the tents long before ten. But that night Miss Varley chose to sit up later. Long after the camp had settled into darkness, a feeble glimmer shone beneath her door. She had taken a key from about her neck, had opened her box, and was sitting before the table, reading. It was a manuscript volume — a journal evidently — with

here and there some loose papers, some verses, a photograph, a half-finished sketch, thrust in between its leaves. At first, Miss Varley had written a few words in it; now she sat turning over the pages, looking at the dates. The earliest of them was of three years before, the latest was of yesterday, and on every page some words were constantly repeated. Once, after a long pause, during which she had sat so motionless you might have believed her sleeping, Miss Varley repeated these words aloud. The wind rustled at the door of her tent, and the girl started up, her heart beating, the color coming and going in her cheeks; and yet there had been nothing to frighten her in what she said. After all, it was only a name — the name of Denis Lawrence.

CHAPTER IX.

SOME GOOD SAMARITANS.

ONE long, unbroken sweep of wheat-fields stretched past and around them. The foot of the hills was thickly overgrown with olives, circling, a silvery gray cloud, about the stones. Higher up, the fig-trees twisted their quaint leafless branches in a network of pale purple against the sky, or rested, a violet smoke, in the crevices and fissures of the rock; and from mountain to mountain the valley flowed one wave of living green. The sky was of a pale and cloudless blue, still tremulous, still quivering with the spent passion of the storm; and spring, that "child of many winds," was in the air, and all the world was filled with a sweet, faint perfume as of a hundred growing things; a low melodious calling of bird-voices; the languid whisper of the breeze, running in green-white waves across the rustling sea of wheat. They were riding across one of the fairest plains in Palestine — across that parcel of ground that Jacob

bought; where Joseph wandered, looking for his brethren; across the valley where Joshua proclaimed the Law; and on and on across the sun-filled land, to the margin of that wayside well where Jesus rested, being wearied with his journey, and spake with the woman of Samaria.

I do not know how it happened that, as they rode along, the conversation fell upon the strange history of Simon Magus. Perhaps it was that Major Thayer had been reading about him of late. It may be Miss Varley had her own reasons for preferring to speak of some impersonal matter. But surely there must be something fascinating to the meagrest imagination in the story of this Samaritan fanatic; this mystic propounder of Egyptian myth and Jewish doctrine; this dreamer of dreams — a prophet bewildered by weak echoes of the large utterance of the early gods; this false Christ; "the Osiris of a known age — a Jupiter within our era;" this Syrian peasant to whom a column was erected in far-off Rome — *Simoni Deo Sancto;* this forerunner of Comte, worshipping the divine idea in the guise of a woman; this visionary, wise with strange wisdom of the East; this impostor, performing daily miracles, "to whom they all gave heed, in the city, from the least to the greatest."

There was, I say, something singularly interesting in this history listened to here under the very shadow of the Mount of Blessing; and so it came to pass that all through the long sunny morning Constance and the Major rode apart.

But it was still early in the afternoon as they passed the first houses of that ancient city, Shechem — the modern Nablous — the city of running streams, and blossom-burdened gardens, and sombre, tunnelled streets.

As they drew up before the door of the tents they heard a discharge of firearms; a company of Turkish horsemen were turning slowly away. It was the governor and his escort, Hassan informed them in an important whisper.

"Governor very strong man here, sir. I tell him you

one big general, make him afraid. P'raps, I not tell him so! Do something not please him, he take away one, two, three, my men."

"Nice kind of person that," said Mr. Stuart, lazily.

"Yes, sir; very big man, sir. Very bad man. I do him honor. Wish I had more guns; I fire another salute."

"Here, take my revolver," says Jack, good-naturedly. He drew his pistol out of his belt and passed it over to the dragoman.

"Oh, Jack, how could you! Think of the horrible noise!"

"What! does it really go off? Do you know I am rather surprised at that. I thought it was an ornament," says Constance, smiling.

The young man turned rather red. "We can't all be Mr. Lawrences," he said, drily; and this time it was Miss Varley's turn to blush.

After lunch they sallied out to inspect the city. And here again Miss Varley walked off with Tom, leaving the other two to follow at their leisure.

They followed on for the most part in silence. Was any thing the matter? Had he offended her? Was it possible that she did not understand — The young fellow, stalking gloomily along, revolving these and kindred questions in his mind, must surely have been but a sorry companion. And yet — Mrs. Thayer did not seemed displeased.

At first they went to Jacob's house, the house where the father mourned for his son many days and refused to be comforted. They pushed open the creaking gate and passed from out the noisy street into an old and silent garden — an up-springing wilderness of rose-bushes and oranges, with here and there a mossy peach-tree thrusting a branch of pale pink blossoms across the narrow path. On one side stood the so-called house — an old church of the time of the Crusaders, but with a Saracenic arch apparently of much earlier date; now it is used as a manufactory of clay jars. They went in

and looked about the deserted enclosure. The workmen had all gone home. The place was quite empty but for the rows upon rows of brown, unbaked jars.

"It reminds me of a burlesque I saw once, 'Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves.' What a capital place for a ballet!" says Jack.

Miss Constance laughs: "Poor Jacob!"

They go out. At the farther end of the garden they come upon a dark, shadowy pool. A single ray of sunlight pierces the glossy green of the orange-trees that lean from the terrace overhead and catches on a fringe of delicate grasses and rank, pale flowers. Beside it two gnarled and aged cacti stand sentinel by the worn old gateway leading through another garden to the square, ruined tower of a mosque. Its gray time-eaten stones are in full sunlight, high-lifted above the trees; here and there a tuft of fern, a waving tuft of yellow wall-flowers, makes a spot of color on its wind-and-rain blanched surface. There is a still, sunny silence brooding like a charm over all the abandoned spot.

It was like the entrance to some enchanted castle, Miss Varley remarked, absently. Had Fanny — had Mr. Stuart — observed those cacti? "The cactus is a plant that always looks to me both deaf and dumb. And those fig-trees up there, by the wall, with their dark purplish twigs carved like fingers, and their leaves like open hands — is there not something uncanny to you about a fig-tree? I saw some to-day, as we rode along, with such intricate tracery of branches they might almost have suggested the Saracenic idea of ornamentation by lines."

"I don't know; I never studied botany," said Mr. Stuart.

Once more they followed their guide down the long, dark street, arched tunnel-wise above their heads; picking their way over slippery, jagged stones; growing suddenly aware of the tumult of hidden streams, and turning a sharp corner to come suddenly out of the gloom and darkness to where a glorious rush of water leaped wildly

over the edge of a ruined archway, and fell in dazzling mist in the brimming basin at their feet. Green masses of clinging fern, and starry blooms, and cool pale water-flowers hung down in lovely profusion, glistening with moisture, and trembling with the movement of the fall; and looking through the archway, and through the wonderfully clear water, they could catch glimpses of a sunny lawn and trees waving in the wind.

A little farther on they came upon the church of the Samaritans.

"We go in to see the synagogue, of course?" said the Major.

It was a bare upper-chamber; a white-washed room, with curiously-shaped lamps swinging from the vaulted ceiling. At one end a white sheet was drawn before the Holy of Holies. The high-priest — a young man with a grave, fervent face, the face of a dreamer and an enthusiast: beautiful, ardent, impassioned, like the face of the boy David — the high-priest drew back the curtain, and brought out and showed them the famous manuscript copy of the Pentateuch.

It was a curious scene: the little group of sceptical strangers, the roll of tattered vellum, the noble reverence of the priest bending over it, the three or four slim Syrian lads lounging in the sunny doorway, the small, mean room, the high place and the altar of that strange, forgotten people who feared the Lord and worshipped their own gods.

As they come out into the street once more the party is again divided. Mrs. Thayer wishes to return to the tents.

"Tom will take me there. You can go to the bazaar with Constance," she said.

Mr. Stuart was entirely at Miss Varley's service.

"I think I shall go back with Fanny," that young lady remarks.

"Nonsense!"

"But, indeed, Fanny —"

"Go on with Jack, and wait for me in the bazaar.

I 'll join you presently with Hassan. I 'm going to make a sketch," the Major says decidedly. And with this understanding they part.

It was an embarrassing moment for them both — the more so, perhaps, that neither was quite sure what had occasioned this change. Of the two there was one who would have given much to have escaped the necessity of any interview. Naturally enough, this one was the first to speak.

"I am afraid we have been very selfish, Tom and I," she says, with a slight increase of color on her cheeks; "Fanny seems so tired. But these people are interesting. I think this is a delightful place — don't you?"

"I think so — now," says Mr. Stuart.

Some men passing along the road turn again to stare at the strangers, and Mr. Stuart returns their glances with a little of that abounding contempt we instinctively exhibit towards people who, in all probability, will never be in any fashion connected with ourselves.

"It is so seldom Tom can be got to talk. Tom is something like an Englishman in that respect. Did you never notice how an American will invariably endeavor to be interesting at any cost — either to others or to himself? Now an Englishman has the courage to be dull."

"Some of us are dull enough without that," says Jack, moodily.

The Arabs are still standing watching him. They whisper together. As the young man brushes by them there is a hoarse cry of "Backshish!" and then an insolent laugh. It is only a trifling annoyance, but it comes charged with the weight of the morning's exasperation, and sends the hot blood flushing to his forehead. He turns upon Constance with that sudden, irrational resentment of an unpleasant impression which is, perhaps, at the bottom of half the follies of life.

"Don't you think these small travelling-parties are a mistake?" he says, with an air of elaborate impartiality.

"One sees the same people so continuously that — in fact, you see the same people so much."

Miss Varley is entirely of his opinion. She says so, and then bends down and busies herself with the folds of her habit to conceal a most unequivocal smile.

"Yes, I am tired of it," says Mr. Stuart.

"Indeed!"

"I am tired of the whole thing. You treat me like a boy. You laugh at me. You — you attempt to — to patronize me, by Jove!" cries the young man, turning very red. "I don't like it. I don't think you are treating me fairly, Constance," he says, with sudden firmness, with an assertion of mastery in his voice that she has never heard before.

Miss Varley draws herself up and turns her face full upon him, and all the light and animation have gone out of that face.

"You are probably not aware of what you are saying. You will excuse me if I fail to understand —" she begins very coldly; and then there comes a sudden look of kindness in her eyes. "What is the use of quarrelling, Jack? You know you are talking nonsense. When have I ever done any thing purposely to vex you?" she says very gently.

A group of fair-haired Nablous children are standing in a doorway. At the sight of the strange faces approaching them they dart away like frightened birds, all but one, a little boy of two or three, who stands in the middle of the street and contemplates them meditatively. Such a flower-face as it is! with the beautiful, open look of a peach-blossom overblown. "Come here, you delightful little creature, and get some backshish," says Miss Varley, and holds up a tempting silver coin. There is a moment's hesitation, and then the baby comes forward a few steps, stops, stares about him. "Poor little thing!" says Constance, and stoops to pick him up. To her surprise the child resists her with sudden, shrill cries of alarm.

"Oh, put him down, do!" says Jack, hastily. There is quite a crowd around them by this time.

"Poor little thing! You don't suppose it was afraid I had the evil eye?" begins the girl; and at the same moment a woman, veiled and shapeless in her cotton gown, breaks through the ring, seizes the sobbing child in her arms, and turns and addresses the crowd in high-pitched Arabic.

"Come on!" says Mr. Stuart again, and this time with even stronger emphasis. "Let that little wretch alone; it doesn't want your money. Here, let 's get out of this."

But this is not so easily done. It is true the crowd parts before them, but only to close about on every side. "Backshish!" yells a tall, one-eyed lad in a tattered gown, who has followed them persistently since they entered the bazaar. "Backshish!" calls out a man, putting a hand on Miss Varley's shoulder and stooping to look into her face. "Back —" A vigorous push sends him staggering against the wall.

"Take my arm; don't be frightened," says Jack, cheerfully. "If we can only get through this infernal bazaar —" A shove from the yellow fanatic on the outside of the ring sends the nearest beggar upon him. He turns, and a shove from the other side flings Constance against his shoulder. No sound; but the double movement meant mischief.

"Oh, what shall we do?" says Miss Varley, turning pale.

To her dying day she will never forget what takes place within the next few minutes.

He took her hands in his; he looked at her with a sort of despairing tenderness.

"Don't be frightened," he says; "there is going to be a row. Here, stand back under that arch, and don't move, whatever happens. Don't be frightened, and don't cry. Don't cry, my darling, I 'll take care of you."

As luck will have it, the arch of which he speaks is the gaudy-painted doorway of the mosque. A savage

howl of execration runs through the crowd at sight of this new outrage. They press forward, stop, waver; and then Jack turns and faces them and draws his pistol from his belt.

"Come on, then! Why don't you come on, you blackguards!" he calls out, in English; and, as by the breaking of a spell, the sound of his voice evokes a very storm of frenzy and abuse. With every moment the tumult increases. A piece of mud knocks off his hat; in an instant it is seized and torn to shreds; and the sight of his blonde, Saxon face is the signal for a new outbreak of impotent rage. Twice already the jeering, hissing mass of infuriated men has pushed and swayed up to the very limit of the steps, and twice the sight of his steady, unblenching face has swept them back again with a sound as of the surf grinding upon the shore. And each time they have lessened the distance between them.

He took three steps forward, paused, then deliberately drew a deep line with the heel of his boot in the dust. "We 'll see who crosses *that*, my men!" he says, significantly. A long howl of defiance is the instant answer. And now, with one common impulse, the mob hurls itself forward and stands straining and foaming like a pack of craven, white-toothed pariah dogs on the farther side of the barrier.

"Don't be frightened, my darling," says Jack; his own face is deathly pale, and great beads of moisture are standing on his forehead.

There is a scuffle, a push; one of the foremost assailants, a half-grown lad in a long, blue caftan, is sent staggering across the mark: he falls heavily on his face and is dragged back by his nearest neighbors. And then comes an ominous pause.

From his vantage-ground on the mosque-steps Stuart overlooks the street; and at this moment he is aware of a disturbance in the spirit of the mob — some new object is drawing their attention. There is a cry of "Allah!" the sound of a low, wailing, inarticulate chant,

a sudden falling asunder of the close-packed men ; in the centre of this space, advancing slowly towards him, is a creature — a man. It has the figure of a man — but whether young or old it is impossible to say. A strip of sheepskin is slung about its waist, a long string of coarse amulets dangles from its neck and down upon the naked breast, covered with hair like the breast of an animal. On his head is a fantastic crown of iron spikes, from under which long and matted locks stream down over his thick arms, his naked, shining shoulders, his fixed and vacant eyes. He comes slowly forward, rolling from side to side in his walk, keeping time to the monotonous, lolling chant. The crowd have fallen respectfully back, he stands alone in the centre of an open space, looking at Stuart with a dull, malignant smile.

"My God! what shall I do?" thought Stuart, clenching his teeth. He moves, and the dervish catches sight of Constance. A sudden, furious gleam of insanity transfigures the livid face. He turns, with a wild gesture of exhortation — he turns and harangues the mob. He turns again — he walks deliberately forward. Jack raises the revolver slowly to a level.

And then a murderous silence falls upon the crowd. The dervish comes steadily forward ; his foot is on the line ; he looks up at Stuart with an idiotic laugh, and then, like a mockery from heaven, they hear through the intense silence the innocent, bubbling laughter of a child.

The dervish passes the line. Constance springs forward with a cry. The next sound is the click of the trigger settling back in its lock.

CHAPTER X.

BLUE LILIES.

"JACK!" She springs forward and clutches him by the arm. "Don't fire! Hassan!" she says wildly, with white, breathless lips; "Hassan — Hassan —"

And even as she speaks there is a clattering charge of mounted men, a swinging of sabres, a slashing of whips, a cheer. The surging mob sweeps back against the steps. In a moment the dervish is seized, surrounded, forced bodily into the shelter of the mosque. Major Thayer springs from his saddle. The Turkish soldiers clear the piazza of the last terrified stragglers. The dragoman rushes forward flourishing his *koorbash*.

"Thank God!" says Stuart, seizing Constance by the hand. And then, for the first time, Miss Varley breaks down.

"Take me home — take me home, Tom, to Fanny," she says piteously.

"Will you ride?"

"No; I don't know: take me home," she says, and walks on blindly, clinging to his arm, the centre of an excited, questioning, explaining group.

In three or four minutes they have reached the camp. As they enter the tent Miss Varley turns to Stuart:

"I haven't thanked you. But — you know," she says brokenly. She gives him both her hands. Then she sits down on a chair in a corner and begins to cry.

Mr. Stuart, too, sits down. He looks about him with a bewildered air.

"Good heavens! Jack, are you hurt? Will you have some brandy? some water? Your face is as white as a sheet! O Tom, why don't you do something? Don't you see that Jack —"

"I 'm not hurt, Fanny. I 've been badly frightened. I never knew what it was like before," says Mr. Stuart, simply; "but I had Constance to take care of, you know, and — Look here!"

He threw his revolver down upon the table. Major Thayer picks it up curiously, examines it, starts, and throws it down again with an oath.

"I let Hassan have it for that salute. I had forgotten all about it. You see — it wasn't loaded!" says Jack.

The following afternoon found them still at Nablous. Fanny did not feel well, for one thing; her nerves had not yet recovered from yesterday's excitement. Then Abdallah's foot was no better, a horse had gone lame, the head-muleteer had a wife in Shechem.

"In fact, the more I hear our delay explained, the less I seem to understand it," Major Thayer remarked, testily.

They were winding up Mount Gerizim, and it was to Miss Varley he spoke. The Major had all that aversion to stopping which you notice in unoccupied people — that terror of a pause, which is so suggestive of the anticipation of a corresponding vacuum. And just now this latest annoyance found relief in a proposition peculiarly unacceptable to Constance, for:

"I shall stay here and sketch. Fanny particularly wished me to get a good sketch of Nablous. And I think she was quite right in advising me to take it from half-way up the hill," he said.

Miss Varley suggested they could wait and all ride up together, later. Mr. Stuart thought it would be a pity to miss the sunset. Hassan was of opinion the horses needed exercise. Of course it ended in their going on.

It was a sunny, breezy afternoon. As they turned their horses' heads towards the distant mountain-top, a cool and playful air blew freshly down upon them, luring them onward to the wind-swept freedom of those heights. The very greyhound, bounding on before, seemed instinct with new force and life, making wild rushes at elusive birds, flinging his supple, golden-brown body high in air, in frantic efforts to make will take the place

of wings, or pausing, erect and quivering, upon some overhanging rock to watch their slower ascent. They were riding across a strikingly beautiful country, over both sacred and historic ground. But both were preoccupied, and both were unusually silent.

We hear so much of woman's power of intuition — now that the exemption from all that power implies is claimed — that possibly the phrase may serve once more to account for the feeling of confused apprehension with which Miss Varley looked forward to the conclusion of this ride. Indeed, she had hardly recovered as yet from the excitement and suspense of yesterday. Stuart's courage, his devotion, the simple fashion in which he had accepted her thanks, appealed, each in its different degree, to the keenest instincts of her nature. And liking, admiration, a quick responsive generosity — that very habit of thrusting self into the background which was so characteristic of this girl — were ranged upon his side; were met, were answered by the strong involuntary recoil with which she shrank from admitting any claim — the slightest — which could modify her sentiment toward Lawrence.

"He will never know what I gave him; let me know that I gave it all!" was her inward cry.

There was a bitter satisfaction in the very completeness of the sacrifice. But now, as she rode on, her predominant sensation might have been translated into an unreasonable conviction that something was coming. And it came.

The afternoon was singularly lovely. When they reached the mountain-summit great patches of cloud-shadow were resting like so many vaporous islands on the broad, billowy sweep of the plain. On one side, the blue line of the Moabite mountains melted away in a dream of distant horizons; on the other, the wide reach of the Mediterranean curved and glittered in the sun.

Half-way up, after they had left the Major, even after they had passed the gray olive groves amidst the rocks, there was an attempt at cultivation; but here were

stones — nothing but stones — growing larger and larger as one ascended, until the ground was littered with rows upon rows of square-hewn blocks, and the confusion culminated in a ruined building, whose small, white dome is a landmark for miles across the plain.

Here they left the horses. A few steps farther on the massive Roman wall is broken into windows. Small knotted fig-trees thrust their weather-beaten branches from between the stones, and the red anemones, bending and flickering in the wind like thin, blown flames from subterranean fires, added a touch of crimson grace — "Love settling unawares."

"Those trees remind me of certain personalities," Miss Varley remarked, glancing round her. "Do you remember old Mr. McMoon?"

"The old Scotchman at Jerusalem, who admired you so much?"

"Yes. That is — I don't know about the admiration. I think there was something so pathetic about the poor old fellow — old, and unsightly, and grimly tenacious of life, like one of those trees. Do you know he confided to me one day, when we were all out on the roof, that he had been devoting his life since he was eighteen to making money, and, now that his fortune was made, he would like to devote his money to getting back his life?"

"The more fool he," said Jack, sententiously.

"Do you really think so? He always seemed to me more like a sermon on the folly of telling people to subdue their desires while they are young, and wait for judgment before they face the world. Giving him the use of his life now was like throwing a smoked herring into the sea. He had returned to his native element again; but after a trial by fire. He was just as much of a fish as ever, only — he couldn't swim!"

Mr. Stuart smiled. It pleased him to fancy that Constance was clever, as it had pleased him, a week before, to hear of one of his old class-mates having distinguished himself by a volume of translations from the Greek.

The cleverness, in his comprehension of things, bore, perhaps, the same relation to real life as the dead language. Both were distinctions in their way, and neither prevented a pleasant feeling of easy superiority on the part of a man who understood, and acted upon, the facts of existence.

But, just now, it pleased him most of all to lean against these crumbling ruins and watch Miss Varley's movements, the proud and gracious pose of her head, the flush of color on her cheek. It was with a perfect, a luxurious sense of satisfaction that the young man lounged by her side in the broken embrasure, gazing idly down at those sunny fields, and saw his future stretching out before him, cheerful, and sunny, and secure as they. A premonition of approaching happiness — not of content, but of happiness, full, unmeasured, incalculable — seemed to float in the very air around him, seemed to shine and dazzle through all the sunlight of this brilliant day. He looked up at Constance; he looked back again at the valley; he smiled; he drew a long breath; he hesitated. It was a supreme moment in his life.

"I don't know how it is," he observed presently; "when I am not with you I am always waiting for you, looking for you, expecting you. I feel as though I had something of the utmost importance to tell you. And when you are there — "

He stopped and looked up, suddenly; then turned away and began thrusting his stick between the crevices in the stones.

"That is one of the many disadvantages of a small party," said Constance, demurely.

"You know I never meant that!"

"Indeed, I know nothing of the kind! I've a very good memory, I assure you."

"I should like to think you remembered something else I told you yesterday," said Jack.

Miss Varley blushed, and felt herself blushing.

"What one says is of less consequence. I never

shall forget what you did. Never. I shall never thank you for it, because — "

"I don't want to be thanked. I would do any thing for you."

"You have done a great deal." She put out her hand, and picked a flower growing on the arch above her head. "I think we had better be going. Tom will be waiting," she said.

"Are you not comfortable where you are?"

"Yes. But Tom — "

"Tom be hanged! You are always in such a hurry to go," says Jack, reproachfully. "Now I — I am different. And, beside that, I want you to stay here. I want to talk to you. Constance."

"Well?"

"I wish you would tell me something about yourself. You always speak of other people — of me. It is not my own story I want to know, it is yours. Tell me — "

"There is nothing to tell."

"Nothing?"

"Nothing. What sort of a story could I have? What do I ever do, what have I ever done that could interest you?" she answered, a little hurriedly. "I never went anywhere until we came here. I never had an adventure in my life until yesterday. I could give you the names of a thousand books or so I have read in the last three years. I can't tell you any thing else. And if I did — "

"Well? If you did?"

"You would not understand."

"Try me," said Jack, eagerly.

She shook her head. "You would not understand," she said.

And I, for one, am inclined to believe that she was right. We see in others what we are prepared to see in them, not what they actually represent. The difference between these two people was a difference of temperament, of aim, of quality, of a hundred irreconcilable things.

Above all, it was a difference of aim; and there is, perhaps, more vital separation implied in this difference of desires than in the most opposing circumstance.

But of this, which she felt vaguely, he was quite unconscious. He never imagined for a moment that a woman's opinions were less open to modification — of more importance as regarded his relation to her — than her dress. If you had hinted to Mr. Stuart that Constance might object to marry him because he took his idea of Browning from the newspapers, preferred Mark Twain to Sophocles, and thought the Mona Lisa a plain woman with a high forehead — not half so pretty as the photographs of half-a-dozen girls he knew — well, the probabilities are he would have considered you mad.

"You spoke of three years ago. How strange it is we should have known each other then. I had seen you, and I did not know — I mean — who could have ever imagined we should be here to-day together as — as we are."

"Three years! It is a long time," said Constance.

"You have not changed."

"You think not?"

She looked away down into the sunlit valley, and little by little the light faded out of her face.

"I *have* changed," she said slowly. She twisted the flower she held between her fingers, and laid its blossom absently against her lips. "I *have* changed."

"Yes, so have I," said the young man, eagerly. "I know now — what I didn't know then, Constance." He leaned forward a little and took her hand in his. She did not move away, but her fingers grew cold and trembled, and she kept her eyes fixed upon her lap. "Give me that flower," said Jack.

"No."

"Constance!"

And now she looked up and saw him standing before her — a tall, handsome fellow, his face all aglow with excitement and passionate hope. Her eyes dropped.

"You will give me that flower?"

"No," said Constance again.

"Look at me! I— Look at me, Constance, dearest! Why — why do you think I want it?"

Constance did not answer.

"See here!" the young man said, impetuously. He put his hand in his breast-pocket; took out a card-case. His hand shook as he began turning over its leaves. "Look!" There was a Syrian lily pressed between the pages. "Do you know where I got that? You gave it to me. You gave it to me on the way to Jericho. I shall never forget that day. It was the first time — I want you to give me that flower because — I love you. I love you, Constance!"

"No!" Miss Varley, too, had risen to her feet; she had pushed away Lione's head; her flowers had fallen to the ground. And now she lifted up her face, and looked at him with grave, compassionate eyes. "It is impossible," she said, gently.

"Impossible, Constance? But I love you!"

"Yes. I am — very sorry," she said. Her eyes were full of tears.

And then there was a long silence.

"Dear Jack," the girl says presently, going up to him and laying her hand upon his arm, "I am so sorry. If I could have helped it — But you — you would not understand."

"Do you think I did not?" he answers bitterly. "Oh, you need not be alarmed. You are right enough. I am not going to blame you. It is no one's fault but my own, and I — I loved you so!" he says, with a sudden break and tremor in his voice.

"Dear Jack!"

"Constance, you do care for me — you will! I don't say now, but some time; you — you must care for me some time!" he says wildly. "Constance! you are so good, so dear; it is impossible you should be so cruel to me!" For the first time in his experience he has been exalted, lifted above himself by a wave of supreme emotion. "I — I can't believe it!" he cries, with a

sort of bewildered rage. "It 's impossible. You cannot — you will not mean it," he says imploringly, seizing her hand in his. "Constance — "

"I cannot, Jack. I like you; I am very fond of you. I will always be your friend — "

"And you will never love me?"

Miss Varley was silent.

"Never?"

"Never."

"Well, that 's hard!" said Stuart, drawing a long breath.

He got up; walked away a few paces. Lione sprang to his feet and stood watching him in eager expectation of the signal to move on.

Constance too rose, and looked about her, and paused, irresolute. She was profoundly moved by the sight of his distress.

A woman can rarely persuade herself that by refusing to marry a man she has not inflicted upon him a serious injury, and this in the face of the clearest conviction of the utter unsuitableness of the match. It is true that we are more apt to estimate a gift by what it costs us than by the value it represents to another. Before blaming Constance for this — for any thing which followed — it would perhaps be well to remember how all her own conception of suffering was centred, as it were, about this one phase of experience — the pain of baffled desire. Memory intensified her comprehension of Stuart's disappointment. The thought of Denis was one with the impulse which made her go forward a few steps and put out her hand.

"Jack!"

Mr. Stuart turned, his sunburnt, boyish face wearing a look which surely it had never worn before.

"Don't distress yourself. It hasn't been your fault. Other fellows have been through this sort of thing before now," he says; "only — if you are expecting something different — "

There is a pause, and then: "Well! that is over,"

he says firmly. "Shall we go down? Tom will be waiting."

This time it is Miss Varley who hesitates. She hesitates, and then, perhaps, with a sense of the hopelessness of further discussion, perhaps even with some slight recognition of the superior wisdom of silence, she gathers up her gloves and whip and signifies her readiness to go.

Mr. Stuart's note-case is still lying on the window-ledge.

"You have left your pocket-book," she says, pointing with her whip.

He took it up, looked at it, took out the faded lily and held it in his hand.

"See! I can let it go now, but it has left a stain," he said sadly, and let the discolored petals flutter to the ground.

They walked down to where the horses were waiting, without another word, and, once mounted, they picked their way down the difficult mountain-trail with a burning consciousness of the irrevocable and the changed. And as they rode on thus in agitated silence:

"Hollo! Why, you 're not going to ride over me, are you?" said a brisk and cheerful voice.

It was Major Thayer — the Major, whom they had quite forgotten — sitting upon his camp-stool in the shade of an olive, smoking, his white hat resting on the back of his head, and a quiet smile of middle-aged content playing about his mouth as he sat and contemplated his sketch.

The commonplaces of life reasserted themselves with a start.

"Well, any new facts about the Samaritans?" the Major asked; and it was Mr. Stuart who answered him, with admirable composure. The ride had been — well, quite worth taking. It was rather rough on the horses, certainly. He had noticed as they were coming down that Miss Varley's horse was going a little lame on the right fore foot. But the view was quite what "Murray" described.

"So you are glad you went, Constance?"

Miss Varley had turned round to call Lione. She did not hear.

"So it seems we have all been making good use of an afternoon," the Major concluded cheerfully. "I don't brag much of my sketches as a general thing; but if you will just look at that bit of distance there — and the way that minaret comes out between the trees — why, hang it all, man, don't stand in your own light! Here, pass it over to Constance. And I think," said the Major, complacently, folding up his camp-stool and shutting up his box, "I think, for once, Fanny will be satisfied with all of us."

And again it was Mr. Stuart who answered. He had no doubt of it. And all through dinner — through the ordeal of Fanny's questioning — all through the long evening which followed, the young man preserved this unruffled calm. It is true Mrs. Thayer observed he never looked at Constance; but then, on the other hand, they spoke to each other often and pleasantly; nor in his manner of addressing Miss Varley could his critic detect the slightest deviation from the general tenor of his speech. It was only after dinner, when the ladies had both retired, and Jack and the Major were sitting together in that friendly silence which is the exclusive prerogative of our sex, that Mr. Stuart exhibited any symptoms of disquiet.

He got up, poured himself out a glass of whiskey and water, lit a cigar, set the glass down on the table, and threw the cigar on the floor.

"I 'm going out," he said briefly, and suited the action to the word.

It was a still and starry night. The camp was pitched on a small circular plateau overhanging the ravine. The young man thrust his hands in his pocket, walked over to the farther side and looked down. The shadowy mass of Mount Ebal towered up darkly before him, dimly outlined against the clearer sky. A sound of running water gurgled softly through the stillness. He

could hear the jackals calling to one another from the coverts of the mountain.

He stood there a long while, meditating. He turned his head and looked at a tent where the light was still shining, he glanced up at the stars above him ; once he even whistled softly to himself, and it may be that at this moment a vague idea of shooting jackals mingled with his more sentimental musings. But there was, perhaps, less philosophy than might have been expected in this patient lingering to see the last glimmer of light extinguished in that particular tent, or in the half-uttered blessing with which he turned away.

"Stuyvesant couldn't do it. But I'll do it yet!" he said between his teeth with sudden energy, and looked up as though taking the silent stars to witness of his resolve. The stars shone calmly bright. It may be a more impassioned lover would have seen some cold and still denial in that calm ; a more superstitious watcher might even have attached some foolish significance to the wild, rattling peal of derisive laughter with which the jackals greeted his remark. But then, Mr. Stuart was not superstitious.

CHAPTER XI.

IN ARCADY.

"AND then?"

"Oh, then we went all the way up to the top. I've told you that before."

"And then?"

"Then we did like the king of France."

"The king of —"

"France. Who rode up a hill with all his twenty thousand men, and then — rode down again. Fanny, your historical education has been neglected."

"I do wish you would be serious," said Mrs. Thayer.

"I am serious; perfectly so. If you are curious to know what we talked about, my dear, why that is another question. I remember speaking of Mr. McMoon for one thing. There was a fig-tree up there that looked exactly like Mr. McMoon."

"Mr. McMoon had the face of a monkey," Fanny remarked, impatiently.

"That only shows what a good old family he belongs to. I think it is rather nice myself to resemble one's ancestors," the girl answered, gravely.

They were on their way to Samaria, riding along a narrow path under leafy boughs by the side of a foaming mill-race. Constance was near the palanquin; Mr. Stuart and the Major far on in advance; and the expression on Miss Varley's face was hardly in strict unison with the nonsense she was talking.

Possibly Mrs. Thayer was aware of the discrepancy.

"I wonder," she said presently, looking up with an innocent air, "I wonder what Aunt Van — we are sure to meet Aunt Van at Damascus — what she will think of Jack?" And then, receiving no answer, "I am so disappointed in Jack," she went on, in a regretful manner.

"Why, Fanny?"

"Well, one expects confidence from a *friend*," said Fanny, softly.

Miss Varley blushed. "I — you must admit yourself, Fanny, that there are certain things — "

"Oh, I was speaking of Jack, my dear. You and I are very old friends, indeed. It would be a pity if we could not understand each other," said Mrs. Thayer, sweetly.

It was a fact that they had known each other a long while. Looking back, Constance could hardly remember a scene in her life in which Fanny had not played her pretty, complacent part. There was never a subject, save one, in which Fanny's preference had not had its influence; or ever a pleasure, again with that exception,

in which Fanny had not shared. And to a nature endowed with the fatal gift of sentiment, this very habit of giving constituted an irresistible claim. "Constance would do any thing for me," was Fanny's habitual formula. It seemed to Mrs. Thayer a truly providential arrangement that she should have this opportunity of superintending the fashioning of her friend's life. For, curiously enough, the admiration was chiefly on the other side. With all Fanny's affectionate solicitude, and she was really very fond of Constance, there was mingled some secret doubt and wonder at a simple and generous credulity she was quite unfitted to understand. For, indeed, it is rather remarkable to what a superlative degree of contempt for human nature the average individual can attain, by simply shutting his eyes to the existence of any loftier standard than that by which he measures his own acts.

But they are riding to Samaria. It is a soft, gray morning. The sky is overcast, and the warm gusts of wind spatter sharp raindrops in their faces, but as yet there is no shower. They have not been riding long before the road turns abruptly to the right, and begins climbing the terraced hill to the breezy upland of old Samaria. Its rows of discrowned columns, wind-eaten and worn and gray, stand in an orchard of gray fig-trees, leafless as yet, but with some subtle hint of color playing about them and foretelling spring. The loose, thin veil of clouds gives a new tenderness of coloring to the day. There is nothing jarring, nothing to disturb this sweet monotony of soft, gray skies, gray olive-groves, and the fresh, vivid green of the rain-awakened grass. Some of the columns are stained with yellow lichen, and all are defaced and time-worn. Nature has so taken them to her heart they have become of the very texture of the moss-grown trees about them; and there seems nothing startling, nothing incongruous, in finding them thus alone amidst the freshness of the blossoming fields.

"I will make Samaria as an heap of the field and as plantings of a vineyard," Constance quoted beneath her

breath. They had ridden up to the crest of the hill and there dismounted. Major Thayer was making a sketch.

They were standing perhaps on the very site of the great Baal temple. Here had been the groves of Ashtaroth; here the brazen serpent that Moses made; and here the flaming chariot and horses of the sun. Looking across the swelling upland, "fair with the precious things of the lasting hills, the precious things of the earth and the fulness thereof," where the people had set up their images and groves in every high hill and under every green tree, they could see perhaps the very path the prophet had taken, going out to the wilderness, to yet another chariot and other horses of fire.

It was curious to turn from those Chaldean sages, grave Eastern worshippers of all the hosts of heaven — through the turbulent, blood-stained reign of Jewish prophet and king — to these pilgrims of a later day, these worshippers of another faith, heralded by yet another Star in the East. And still the young flowers smiled and danced like children in the sweet morning air; the patient mother earth thrilled responsive to the wooing touch of yet another spring; and all the familiar miracle of life swept, and breathed, and broke with ever fresh insistence about the lonely hill.

An Arab was ploughing his orchard, among the columns, under the trees. At the end of the furrow he paused; he leaned his arms upon his plough — the sharpened root of a tree; the big, brown oxen stood still, and all three turned their heads and gazed at the strangers with slow, indifferent eyes. He went on with his work without even lifting his head as the travellers rode away.

Down by the village another surprise was awaiting them — a Gothic cathedral, roofless and sunken, but otherwise entire. It was built —

"Don't tell me it was built by the Empress Helena," said Constance, laughing. "That terrible woman! she is as unescapable as original sin!"

"This is where John the Baptist is buried. Will you

hand me that 'Murray,' Tom? Yes; here 's the place: 'The total length of the interior —' That 's not it. 'A little chamber excavated deep in the rock, to which the descent is by —' Oh, Jack, would you mind going down into that hole and counting the steps? Dr. Adams would be so interested —"

"Then somebody must come with me to carry the candle," said Jack.

"I 'll go."

Miss Varley took a light from the dragoman. "Let me go first. You might fall;" and then Fanny, looking down into the pit, hears only a confused murmur of voices. The lights twinkle and disappear.

"Brava, Fanny! Very neat, indeed," says the Major, laying down his sketch-book and beginning to sharpen a pencil, "Very neat, my dear."

"Neat?" Mrs. Thayer looks about her with an air of ingenuous wonder. "People have different opinions, I know — and, of course, I don't pretend to be much of a judge of architecture; but, upon my word, it is the first time I ever heard the word applied to a ruin!" she says, with a toss of her head.

Major Thayer's laughter was distinctly audible in the vault below.

"Tom is enjoying himself," said Constance, with a smile. She held the candle higher and looked about the blank walls of the dungeon. A long, white lizard started at the unwonted light, scurrying across the stones. There was a slow dripping of water at the farther end of the room.

"Do you believe John the Baptist was really buried here?"

"I don't know."

"Do you care?"

"Not much. Do you?"

"No."

They both laughed. "Here! give me the light to carry," said Stuart, with sudden gravity.

"Constance!"

"Well?"

He turned abruptly; held the candle closer to the wall and began examining the jointure of the blocks.

"There isn't any mortar. It looks more like Roman work," he began. And then, facing round suddenly; "You said, yesterday, that we might be friends. Very well. I accept your offer. We will be — friends," he said, steadily, and held out his hand.

Fanny looked at them curiously as they came up the steps again and out into the dazzling daylight.

"Well?"

"Oh, there was nothing!"

"Not even the steps," says Major Thayer, gravely. "Constance, are you a good judge of architecture? Fanny is —"

"It was the least thing you could do, to go down and look at the grave of your patron saint," says Fanny, hastily, turning to Stuart.

Was John the Baptist Jack's patron saint? The Major professed himself profoundly ignorant upon these questions. "But was not John, your namesake, the John who lost his head for a woman — for Salome?" he asks, with a peculiar smile.

While they were waiting for the horses, Jack strolled away carelessly down the road between the cactus-hedges. For a wonder he came back with his hands full of flowers.

"Will you have some blue lilies?" he said to Constance.

It was a long, still, uneventful morning. There was a sense of ineffable repose in the sight of those soft, low-hanging clouds, in the touch of that soft and windless air. At luncheon-time they left the rocky path, forded the wide, shallow bed of the brook that since earliest morning had mingled its joyous babble with their own more desultory talk, and stretched themselves out at ease upon the short, close grass of the mountain-slope. The horses were picketed amongst the trees. A few paces off the muleteers were coming and going, were

piling armfuls of crackling thorn upon the noonday fire. Now and then a pale gleam of sunlight awoke a splendor of color among the rocks, deep embedded in flowers — large cupped anemones, purple and red and opal white; white daisies, yellow chrysanthemums; rose-colored cyclamen, and silvery mallows with dark curling leaves, and low-creeping thyme. Now and then some sudden raindrops made a soft, quick pattering overhead.

"Have you any money in your pockets? Hark! I hear the first cuckoo of the spring," said Fanny.

They listened. The melancholy love-cry of the homeless bird called to them from the far-off, unseen woods. They listened. There stole a sound of clear, continuous fluting on the air. A thin, sweet sound of shepherds piping to their flocks; pure and remote as though floating down to them from out some sunny vale of Arcady; a faint, unfamiliar joyousness of melody, which made them pause, and turn, and look, in the silence of incredulous delight. And as the sweet sound ceased, they heard the humming of bees deep in thick-creeping thyme.

"This *is* pastoral. A perfect idyl," said the Major.

Lione lifted his sleek head, pricked up his ears, and growled.

"There comes the little beggar himself," said Jack.

There was a soft pattering of many feet across the turf, and the boy passed before them, still fingering his oaten pipe, and followed by a troop of long-haired goats.

"Do listen to him again," said Constance.

They listened again. The dappled sunshine flickered to and fro with the gentle stirring of the wind among the leaves. The air was delicious; the breeze was soft and fitful; the sense of peace profound. The boy went on playing. The wise old goats shook all their venerable beards, nibbling the flower-spotted grass. Here and there some black-faced patriarch of the flock raised himself up, planting his sharp feet firmly in the black ivy, and tearing down green wreaths of honeysuckle, or stretched his long neck

upwards to crop the tender shoots of the wild olive. The boy played upon his pipe. Jack tossed him a piece of bread. He let it lie at his feet; placidly looked and played.

"By Jove! the little rascal isn't hungry," said Jack.

"How could you throw it at him in that way? But do listen," said Constance.

And now the shepherd blew more softly on his flute, idly, slowly; the goats came trooping down together, jostling each other, by twos and threes. He turned without a word, and passed away between the olives; and still, as he turned away, the fitful notes stole plaintively back borne by the fitful wind.

"I call this exquisite," said Constance, with a deep-drawn sigh of pleasure.

And it was exquisite. It was like Theocritus: something lovely, and young, and utterly untouched by care, full of the simple delight of being.

"Dear child, what do you care for that boy and his whistle and his nasty goats? You haven't eaten a thing. Do take a sardine. That little wretch knows nothing of sardines and olives."

And here Jack, who was lying like a young Theseus, leaning on his elbow, suddenly bent forward.

"By Jove! Look — look, quick! Two lizards fighting. See the little beasts. They mean mischief."

"Dear me; how can you look at any thing so horrid?" said Fanny.

"They are furious," said Jack. "See them twist. There, they roll over! He 's caught the other fellow by the throat. By Jove! I believe he 'll kill him in another minute."

Tom leaned forward; Constance turned; Mrs. Thayer went on eating *pâté de foie gras*.

The lizards were locked together, ferocious, intense; their scaly backs were of the most vivid green. The one had gripped the other by the under side of his throat, the jaw sharp-shut upon its soft, white skin. The victim was panting, writhing, struggling for release.

"But he will kill him! Do separate them, do!" cried Constance.

"Yes," said the Major, "it's a death-struggle. And look at Madame Lizard hurrying off, she who has caused the row. See her delicate ladyship scurrying away. Just like a woman! She can't endure the sight of her own mischief."

"She is horrid," said Constance; "an ugly, gray thing not worth looking at. But don't let that dreadful green beast kill the other one. Do stop them, Jack."

Jack rose and pushed them apart with the end of his riding-whip. They did not even notice his intrusion. They were mad with battle. He had literally to pry them apart; and, as he did so, they swiftly ran in circles, head to tail and tail to head, snapping at each other's throats, and again the weakest one rolled hopelessly over. Again Jack pried them apart; this time the smaller one tried to escape, but only to be pursued, overtaken, seized.

And now even Fanny surrendered her comfortable seat, and stood up to see the fray.

"How can you?" Constance asked.

"Oh, let them have it out. Why stop them? It's nature; and I'm curious to see which will win."

"Yes," said Jack, "it's nature; but the little fellow is plucky, and he's Constance's *protégé*. He shan't be killed."

"Yes," said Tom, "play Providence; rescue the one who shows the most fight."

And this time the larger one glided away, leaving his victim panting among the olive-roots.

"Rather knocked out of time that last round," Mr. Stuart remarked, poking him up with his stick.

"Oh, Jack, please —"

"Hollo! here comes my lady back again," said Jack.

The timid, plain little animal came out of its hole, and furtively looked about.

"'O woman, not too bright or good,' &c.," said Tom, leaning back and lighting his cigar. "She has

welcomed the hero of the fight, and now she comes out in pity to look after the victim! There 's a touch of nature for you! Lovely woman! whichever side loses she wins, and finds time to console both parties. And here endeth the first lesson. Pass me those matches, Jack."

"Nonsense," said Fanny, tossing her head.

"No," said Constance, "she suffers for both sides. Her sympathies are wide and impersonal. She is an angel of pity."

"As though a man wanted pity," said Jack.

"Well, I don't know," said Constance, thoughtlessly; "you know it is the very next thing to love."

Mr. Stuart was looking at the landscape.

CHAPTER XII.

SHOWING HOW MR. STUART BROKE HIS BRIDLE.

THE Plain of Esdraelon.

It was one day last winter, a Sunday, and Constance was in church. It was a bitterly cold morning;—bitterly cold, that is to say, for the ragged groups of men and women huddled about the station-house fires, loitering before the eating-house windows, crouching over the gratings before the newspaper offces to feel the warmth of the steam-fed machines; striving in a hundred forlorn fashions to retain some hold upon their objectionable and unimportant lives;—but here, in church, it was warm enough in all conscience. It was too warm. Pastor, and discourse, and people—all were suffering alike for want of a little freshness.

Well, the Litany was over. A well-dressed congregation had listened in well-bred silence to the repeated and mellifluous admission, on the part of the choir, that they were miserable sinners. Saint Clare's is famous

for its music. Last winter the primo-soprano alone drew a salary of fifteen hundred dollars a year. Her stage name, I believe, was De Montmorency. The Litany was over; the Ten Commandments had been rehearsed with decorous speed. The clergyman — (a pale young man with a severe and ascetic face; a pastor who spoke to his prosperous flock with a hardly-veiled contempt, and the moment after was well-nigh moved to tears at the thought of the Virgin Mary; an ambitious man, who yet would cheerfully imperil his standing in the diocese and his future prospects in life by the lighting of an extra candle for conscience' sake; an enthusiast, ready to undergo martyrdom for the folding of a chasuble; equally ready, perhaps, to make a "neat thing" out of the disposal of the church's corner lot) — the clergyman had glided into his pulpit, and the sermon had begun.

It had begun, it had even been progressing for some minutes, when those words, "The Plain of Esdraelon," fell disconnected and imperative among the wandering thoughts of Constance. And straightway there arose before her a vision of wide fields. The crowded church grew dim, faded away; for miles and miles she saw the meadowland opening out before her eyes — here, a flaming mass of red anemones; there, yellow and white with myriad nodding daisies; farther on, a sheet of burning azure in the sun. Again she saw the noble lines of the landscape lifting and falling with the large freedom of the sea, to rise and lose themselves at last in the shadowy blue mountains at the horizon. The day was perfection; the sweet rain-washed air blew soft as a caress. All about them the tempered intensity of the sunshine was transfiguring the land until each sun-filled flower-cup burned with vivid and individual life. And there is an intangible, an intoxicating quality in this Syrian spring not to be rendered in words. There is no element of sadness in the landscape here. Judæa, silent and desolate and bare, has still a certain reticence, a self-satisfied, self-sufficing expression in her very austerity. The ineffable languor, the profound melan-

choly of the Italian landscape, has no place among these abandoned and luxuriant plains; and yet, how often that morning had they not been reminded of that "gray Campagna sea?" Even Fanny spoke of it after awhile.

"I never could understand what people rave about the Roman Campagna for," Stuart remarked. "For my part I think, if people cared so much for the beauties of Nature as they pretend to, they would keep their enthusiasm for places where there was something to look at, like the Yosemite, for instance, or Switzerland. I can understand admiring Mont Blanc, now, but the Campagna! Why, it's nothing but a big field."

"And what do you do with your classics, then, you young vandal, you?" the Major demanded.

"Well, I let them pretty much alone as a general rule," said Jack, with his honest laugh. "I didn't come abroad to write a book; I came to enjoy myself. Classical associations may be all very well in their way for some fellows. I like something more modern myself. Why," said the young man, with a great air of scorn, "I've spent the best part of eight or nine years pegging away at Latin and Greek. You can't suppose I *like* them."

"Jack, have you ever heard me calumniate my friends in their presence?" said the Major, solemnly.

"The fact is," Mr. Stuart rejoined, "I'm an American, and I'm glad of it. I don't care to belong to any country where all the biggest men are in their graves. The fact is, Europe has been exaggerated. I don't want to blame the natives for what may not be entirely their own fault, poor devils! I don't censure any man for sticking up for his own institutions, whatever *my* opinion may be of their merits," said this magnanimous young critic; "but when I want something lively, something go-ahead-looking, I know where to expect it, that's all! Somehow, I don't seem to feel very uneasy in my mind about America."

"I thought it was only the typical Britisher who was

supposed to travel for the purpose of dividing the world into Englishmen and 'foreigners,'" said Constance.

"Oh, you mustn't imagine I 'm not glad to have been over on this side, for once. There 's the Leaning Tower at Pisa, now — I shall always be glad to have seen the Leaning Tower — and Vesuvius; and the Colosseum; and St. Peter's. St. Peter's was about as large as I expected."

"St. Peter's is like a tomb," said Constance. "All the Roman churches are like tombs. But St. Peter's is like a great receiving-vault where a dead religion is laid out in state."

"Ah, Florence is the place for me," said Major Thayer, "Florence and the pictures — "

"Oh, I went to see the galleries too. Because I don't like pictures you needn't think I don't go and see them," said Jack, ingenuously. "I haven't missed a gallery yet — except when it was a question of catching a train. I was more than two hours in the Uffizzi at Florence. There was a Venus there, I remember — Titian's Venus. I thought she was very pretty."

"Ah, yes. It *is* considered rather a pretty thing, I believe," said the Major, composedly, flicking at his horse's ears with his whip; "when we go back we must try and go over some galleries together, Jack. I should like to have your opinion — "

"But I 'm not so sure — I mean, I have not made up my mind when and how I shall go back yet," Mr. Stuart remarked gravely.

The Major opened his eyes, looked at Constance. Miss Varley was watching Lione. "Oh, indeed," he said; "I didn't know;" and fell to whistling pensively.

At midday they halted by the side of a shallow, brawling river. A vigorous growth of thick up-springing oleanders followed its course. Some Bedaween were watering their cattle among the bushes.

"Are there many of those men about here, Hassan?"

"Well, sir, plenty, sir."

"Do you know what tribe they belong to?"

"How I know him, sir? You think perhaps I know that kind of men."

"But somebody must know how many there are. Doesn't the Government take any kind of census?"

Hassan looked puzzled. He carefully rubbed a bit of mud off the knee of his black trowsers, coughed, gave an order to the cook.

"The Major means, doesn't the Government ever count these men? Send people out here to find out how many there are, and how they live?" explained Mr. Stuart.

A look of dignified remonstrance came over the dragoman's face.

"What for the Government count them? You think, perhaps, Turkish Government got nothing to do but count men," he said reprovingly.

Jack laughed.

"Well, they don't look a particularly formidable lot, in spite of those long lances," the Major remarked leisurely, taking a survey of the scene.

"No, sir; very good men, sir. I tell the ladies be careful not leave things about. Bedawy steal every thing he see," said Hassan, doggedly. He felt that he was being cross-examined. An unfair advantage had been taken of his willingness to impart information he did not possess. From the blue tassel of his fez to the point of his patent-leather boots, there was not an inch of his short, thick-set, broadcloth-covered body which did not protest against the affront.

The day had grown very warm. It was the first time since their arrival in Palestine that they had been compelled to lunch out in the open. Fanny pitied them very much from the vantage-ground of her shady seat in the palanquin. It was especially hard, as she remarked, on poor dear Constance, who had already been riding all the morning in the sun.

The heat made everybody drowsy. As the afternoon wore on, the train was more and more scattered — a long, irregular line of silent horsemen; the jangling mules of

the palanquin slowly and noisily bringing up the rear. The dragoman had loitered far behind, talking to an acquaintance — a little old man, muffled to his eyes in folds of white linen, riding a diminutive donkey and followed by a boy carrying his pipe — whom they had picked up by the way.

The muleteers were half of them asleep, only now and then some guttural malediction followed the stumbling of a tired horse. Luigi was leading the way, humming an air from an opera in shrill falsetto, sitting sideways upon a baggage-mule among a battery of kitchen pots and pans.

"May one ask what you are thinking of?" said Stuart, suddenly, checking his horse to let Miss Varley overtake him; "you are very silent."

Constance blushed. They had been riding for some distance in true Syrian fashion — the horses following each other in single file. It is an arrangement which has its advantages. For example, she had been thinking of Stuart. Some trivial accident, perhaps the mere catching of the sunlight on the gold-woven *cufieh* twisted about his hat, had turned her eyes in his direction. Stuart looked very well on horseback; Fanny had remarked the fact a hundred times, and there was certainly nothing extraordinary in the attention with which Miss Varley watched his movements. Some casual turn of his head, or hand, had reminded her of the portraits she had seen at Jerusalem. One after the other the faces of his family had risen before her. She remembered them all — the portly father, with the self-satisfied glance; his pretty sister, his mother, the small boy-brother with the pert and comical smile. They might have become her brother and her sister, the girl thought with sudden wonder. No one had ever spoken to her of the Stuarts, and yet, in some subtle fashion, essentially feminine — (one sees evidences of this faculty in the subordinates of all ages) — she had constructed for herself a detailed plan of all their ways and habits. With a curious interest she realized what her own share in that life would

have been. She saw herself Jack's wife — his companion — living his life, shaping her own existence to meet his requirements; and not his alone — the requirements of his family, of his friends. She saw herself transported to another *milieu*, in another atmosphere — a world untroubled by thought, cushioned by respectability, secured against emotion.

She thought of Stuart, of Fanny's counsel. She had reduced her life to an attitude of patient, and loyal, and passionate expectation, until the very force of her purpose had turned against her, and she shrank instinctively from any decisive action. The very readiness with which she was wont to submit her own to another's claim or purpose, gave an inconclusive character to her experience.

But now a puff of summer wind blew gently in her face, sweet with the wooing sweetness of a thousand flowers. She thought of Lawrence. She looked at the figure moving on before her; she looked across the sweep of free, wide fields to the far, serene, unbounded sky. It was with a delicious thrill of triumph Constance remembered that she, too, was free.

"May one ask what you are thinking of?" said Stuart.

Constance blushed. She blushed and smiled, and shook her head. "You are riding the new horse?" she said, interrogatively.

"Yes. Shaitan."

"And how do you like him, Jack? Hassan was very enthusiastic."

"Oh, very well. He 's not accustomed to this quiet way of travelling yet, I fancy. See how he is fretting at the bit. I shall have to give him a run before long to keep him from pulling my arms off," said Jack, carelessly.

"Look!" cried Constance, pointing with the whip.

Two black and white storks rose heavily from out a field of grain, their long wings flapping and their red legs dangling in the air. They flew slowly, in winding

circles, as though anxious to guard or watch over their nest; and a long, waving track in the wheat, the quick apparition of a sleek, brown head showed where Lione was bounding along in pursuit.

"Hurrah! two to one on the dog!" cried Jack, gaily. With a common impulse they touched their horses and dashed up the hill.

On the level ground beyond, Luigi was trotting sedately onward, his reins fastened to his pommel, the tin cans flashing and shining in the sun. Every now and then the mule would come to a standstill and fall to tearing up huge, hasty mouthfuls of wheat by the roots, until her master, missing the tinkle of the bells, would rouse himself from his sleep with a kick, and send her jogging on again, with much shaking of long ears and rattling of loose tins.

"Mind your horse here," said Jack, looking back; and as he spoke his own horse shied violently across the road and then stood immovable, trembling and snorting with fear.

"Out of the way there, Luigi! Confound you, man; can't you move? Don't you see Miss Varley cannot pass," said Stuart, impatiently. Lione had doubled again on his track, the birds were hidden in the undulation of the ground.

"It is of no use; we have lost them!" said Constance, looking about her eagerly. The sharp canter had brought the color to her cheeks and awakened her glance to new life. "Oh, what a pity, I am so afraid Lione will be—"

"By Jove! there he goes now," said Jack, pointing to a slight rise in the plain far away to the left. "Come on, we can easily cut across again and join the road farther up."

He dashed the spurs into his horse; cleared the ditch at a bound. Before Luigi could utter a word of remonstrance the two figures were flying fast across the upland.

"Oh, this is glorious!" Constance cried. The horses were quite fresh, and going with a will.

"Give Saïd his head — don't you see how he likes it?" says Jack, looking back with a laugh.

Down another dip of the ground, up a long hill, and on and on across the short, elastic turf to the quick falling cadence of the hoof-beats, with the wind blowing fresh and wild in their faces, as they dash on faster and faster yet. Hassan has always been proud of his choice of horses, and they do him no discredit to-day, dashing on in free, measured movement, the very embodiment of lightness and joyous strength.

"And Lione?" says Constance, at last, drawing rein. The wind has turned her cheeks to deepest rose; the blue eyes shine and laugh with the sheer exultation of life. "And Lione?"

They slacken pace and look about them. All sign of cultivation has vanished far behind. Before them rises a rolling hill — on either side a lonely sweep of undulating ground. They pause a moment and listen. They hear the deep hurried breathing of the horses; a lark is singing somewhere in the profound blue depths of the sky.

"Let us go on to the top of that hill. Perhaps we may see something. But slowly now; give the horses a chance to rest."

They move on at foot pace. Constance pulls off her gloves, unfastens her large felt hat. "Oh, what a good gallop! and oh, how hot, how hot I am!" she cries gaily. She puts her fingers up to her burning cheeks, and turns, and lets the cool wind lift and ruffle her fine blonde hair. "How lucky that tiresome Hassan was not there to stop us!"

"Yes, we 've done it this time and no mistake," says Jack, with a laugh. The hill-top was farther off than it seemed; a quarter of an hour had passed before they reached its summit. Again they looked around them. The low westering sun struck every fold of the ground, every blade of grass, with warm and opulent color. For miles and miles before, behind, about them the vast green plain, the grass-grown battle-field of a hundred combats, stretched away in silent loneliness.

"I hope you are not tired. We shall have to ride fast to reach camp before dark. I had no idea we had come so far."

"You don't think we ought to go back by the road?"

Stuart shook his head. "Too late. I tell you I had no idea we had ridden such a distance."

"At least I hope you know where camp is?" Constance inquired rather uneasily.

"Well, by George, I should hope I did! A nice fix we should be in otherwise!" said Jack smiling. "There, look where I am pointing. You see that cleft in the hills? not there — more to the right. That is Jezreel. If it wasn't for that dip in the ground you could see the village. I made Hassan point it out to me this morning."

"That! why that is miles away," said Constance, following the direction of his hand.

Oh, they could do it in an hour. But it was a good bit, he admitted cheerfully. "Had they not better be moving on?" Miss Varley was afraid that if they were to do any more fast riding she would have to trouble Jack to tighten up the girth. "I 'm so sorry to give you the trouble. But I felt something give way at that last jump." He is out of his saddle and at her side before she has finished speaking.

"Shall I hold your horse?"

"Thanks, I think I can manage." He loosens a buckle, lifts a flap, and gives a long-drawn whistle of dismay.

"What is the matter?"

"Girth broken. You haven't got a knife, I suppose?"

"No."

"Or a piece of string?" says Jack, despondently, feeling in all his pockets.

"I could give you my necktie?"

She unfastens the ribbon from her throat, and the operation of mending begins. Before it is half over Stuart's horse turns restive, pulls, fidgets, stamps, attempts to kick. "Do let me hold him. You can't do

any thing with that creature at your elbow," Constance says, and takes the impatient animal by the rein.

It was five minutes or more before the delinquent strap was adjusted to Mr. Stuart's fancy, and meantime, far away behind the darkling hills, the day was slowly dying in a royal splendor of flame. When he looked up from his work, a sudden glory had fallen upon the world. Above their heads and all about them floated a deepening glow of fire, as though the very air itself had turned to rose-red flame.

Constance was still sitting with uncovered head; she was sitting erect in her saddle, looking off at the changing lights with a vague, mysterious smile; and to the young man's fancy all the radiance of the sky seemed centring about her face, seemed shining in her deep, large eyes, and crowning with a crown of warm red gold the glorious masses of her hair. He stood and looked at her in silence. Saïd had dropped his head, and was cropping the grass at his feet. The other horse was looking anxiously about him, snuffing the air and stamping. The intense light gave a singular air of wildness to his dilated eyes, his backward-streaming mane.

"Shall we go?"

"Go? Oh yes, we will go," Jack repeated, without moving.

She looked up surprised, and met his eyes fixed upon hers. His whole face was changed — transfigured, as it were — by the intensity, the fervent adoration, expressed in that glance. His eyes held her captive; the strange, resplendent light seemed to shut them out together, to hold them in a world apart; her breath came quick and quicker; it seemed a long while to Constance before he spoke.

"I wish to heaven I had never seen you!"

Constance turned pale. "I — am very sorry —" she began, and then stopped short and bent forward, and began stroking her horse's neck.

Jack saw her lips tremble. "Constance!" He put out his hand appealingly, and checked the motion of

her own. "I did not mean that, Constance. Forgive me — won't you forgive me, dearest?"

She lifted her eyes with an effort, and looked at him.

"I — you are so beautiful. By heaven! I don't think I know myself how much I love you," Stuart answered, with an involuntary tightening of the fingers about her wrist.

Mechanically Constance had gathered together her reins; the horses' heads were on a level. It was an opportunity which Shaitan could not neglect. In an instant he had seized his stable-companion by the lips. They both reared — Jack sprang forward — a furious plunge — a struggle — a sudden violent jerk of the head — and Mr. Stuart staggered back on the turf out of the reach of the vicious feet, just in time to save himself, and see his horse galloping wildly across the plain, the broken halter dragging on the ground behind him.

He got up. He felt his arm. He looked first at the runaway horse, and then at the strap and buckle remaining in his clutch.

"Didn't I tell you that leather was rotten?" he asked, with rueful gravity.

The tone, the expression, the whole situation were too much for Miss Varley's over-taxed nerves. Their eyes met again, and with a common impulse they broke into a peal of inextinguishable laughter.

"No, but really this is no joke," said Jack, checking himself abruptly. "How the deuce are we going to get home? That's the question."

"Yes," said Constance; "how are we going to get home?"

Again they looked about them. From mountain-range to mountain-range the vast plain lay, one trackless sea of shadow. The light was still lingering on the hill-top; and now, for one brief instant, the white houses of Nain flashed out with sudden distinctness, and faded slowly away in the folding of the hills. A

long distance down the valley a dark object was moving rapidly onward — a riderless horse — relieving sharply against the sky.

"You don't think that by galloping Saïd at speed —?"

Mr. Stuart shook his head. "There is not a horse in the camp who could come near him. And then look at the start he has got — the confounded brute!"

"If he reaches the camp before we do — he seems to be running in that direction — they will be terribly frightened. It will look as though you had met with a bad accident," said Constance. It was another reason for hastening on their way.

The short Syrian twilight was well-nigh over before they once more reached the level of the plain. "Have you any idea how we can possibly find our way after dark?" Miss Varley asked.

After a moment's deliberation it was decided to follow in the direction of the wind, which was now blowing steadily from the north.

For the first half-hour or so Mr. Stuart had walked along by her side, his hands in his pockets; and both had been inclined to make rather merry over the absurdity of his position. But as the evening grew rapidly darker, when they could no longer distinguish the configuration of the ground, and as Saïd walked more uneasily, showing more and more inclination to start at the lengthening shadows, "You had better let me lead your horse," Jack said. And since then they had hardly exchanged a word.

It was a very dark night. Above their heads rose a solemn, starless sky, a clear and sombre dome, marked here and there with moving, darker lines of cloud. As their eyes grew more accustomed to the blackness, it was possible to discern the more pronounced inequalities of the pathway, and even the remoter indefinite outline of the hills. All about them was darkness, silence — a sense of mysterious and illimitable space. Once, before they knew it, they found themselves traversing a narrow field of wheat. The ripe and restless grain

rustled and whispered all about them in the darkness, and Mr. Stuart started and peered anxiously around.

"Provided we don't run foul of any of those Bedaween," the young man thought, with rising anxiety. He glanced up at his companion, then hesitated, and checked himself as he was beginning to speak.

As the silence deepened between them, a singular fancy had taken possession of Constance. The darkness, the profound stillness, the monotonous motion of her horse, served at once to soothe and stimulate her imagination. Naturally fearless, her blind, feminine trust in Stuart's prowess, her equally feminine incapacity for appreciating different degrees of danger, prevented her from even suspecting the possible peril of this wild night-ride. She looked about her, but it was only the better to contemplate the veiled, mysterious beauty of the night. She lifted up her eyes — it was to see if not a star were shining in all that vast and shadow-stricken sky. A strange, a solemn emotion, possessed and filled her soul. She sat erect, motionless, feeling herself a mere passive atom borne onward and onward into the night; but her spirit seemed freed and attuned to the very wildness of the wind. The myriad small preoccupations of these last weeks faded and fell away from her like a dream. For the first time for many days she felt alone, alone in spirit; and with a wild and fervent impulse her heart turned and clung to the very thought of Lawrence. She looked about her; the vast dim night was silent and calm and mysterious as the grave. A deep and passionate impatience — the very sickness of hope long deferred — surged in a bitter flood about her overburdened soul.

"You are tired, Constance. I am sure I heard you sigh," said Jack, tenderly.

"Yes, I am — tired," Constance answered. It was hard to keep her voice from trembling as she spoke.

And now Saïd started, quickened his weary footsteps, and then paused and stood still.

"I think, by Jove! I think we have struck the road

at last," said Stuart; and at the same moment Constance turned her head and broke into a low exclamation of wonder and delight. For now the whole western sky was flooded with pale and doubtful radiance, and away behind a craggy hill-top they saw the growing splendor of the slowly-rising moon.

"Yes, this is the right road, surely. We can't be very far from camp, I think." He hesitated and thought a moment. "Yes, I shall risk it," he muttered between his teeth. "Hold your horse well in hand, Constance, and don't be startled. I am going to fire a signal, on the chance Hassan may hear."

He walked a few steps down the road and took out his revolver. Three shots followed each other in quick succession, and seemed to startle the very depths of the silent night. And then again all was quiet, save the quick, anxious panting of the frightened horse. They waited several minutes; gradually Saïd grew quiet again, and yet no answering signal came.

"Well, it was a chance," said Stuart, uneasily. "Hark!" They strained their ears to listen.

"I am sure — yes — I am sure I hear hoof-beats," said Constance, almost in a whisper.

And now it was easy to see that Saïd, too, had heard them; he started, pricked up his ears, and snuffed eagerly at the wind.

"They are several horsemen. They are galloping fast. They are coming this way. I can hear them quite distinctly," said Constance, with rising excitement. "Oh, Jack, are you not glad? Hassan has found us at last. Don't you hear them, Jack? It is Hassan!"

"No," said Mr. Stuart. He comes closer to her and stands beside her horse. "I hate to have to tell you of it, Constance" — the words came out with reluctance — "but I must. It is not Hassan. The men are coming the wrong way. Hush!" he says, with sudden emphasis, and seizes Said by the bridle.

"But, Jack —"

"The Bedaween," says Stuart, in a warning whisper.

The strange horsemen are coming on at full gallop; already they can distinguish a small confused mass moving rapidly across the plain. On the farther side from where they stand a high bank shelters and conceals the road. For a moment the pursuers seem pressing farther on. They hold their breath in silence, crouching back into the shade. But as the strange horses pass abreast, Saïd starts forward with a low whinny of recognition. The enemy halts; wheels about; a moment's parley; and then as Stuart walks boldly forward, a single figure detaches itself from the group, and at the same moment the young man sees a long, tufted spear relieving sharply against the low-hanging moon, and hears a menacing, guttural voice challenging his right to pass.

CHAPTER XIII.

BY THE WATERS OF GALILEE.

STUART knew one word of Arabic; he used it. He walked deliberately forward, keeping his eyes fixed upon his interlocutor. "Backshish," he said, with conciliatory intonation. The Bedawy halted. Stuart took another step forward. The Bedawy wheeled about his horse, lowered his lance. Jack's fingers fell carelessly upon the handle of the pistol in his belt. "Backshish; Jezreel?" he repeated, in an encouraging voice. Then with deep conviction of the necessity of saying something, and a desperate relapse into the vernacular: "I don't suppose you want to get into trouble, my friend," he remarked cheerfully. "That 's a very neat little affair of yours, that lance, I daresay; but if you would kindly keep it rather more out of the conversation —"

The full moon had risen high enough to outline his adversary in sharpest silhouette against the sky. He saw the man rise in his stirrups and look about him.

He saw the light catch and run down the thin, black length of spear. The Bedawy turned in his saddle; a wild, hoarse cry of command; a sudden move forward of all the waiting horsemen; a pause; a short parley. Two muffled figures detached themselves from the group and rode slowly forward.

"Now don't let your friends excite themselves with too much riding," said Stuart recklessly. He spoke loud enough for Constance to hear him. "But, by Jove! I 'd give something to be well out of this," the young man thought. The reinforcement was approaching with deliberate composure. It looked decidedly unpleasant.

Another moment, and the foremost rider had halted directly in front of Jack. He halted, leaned forward, threw back the folds of his long, loose Arab cloak. To Stuart's inexpressible astonishment he laughed; he held out his hand.

"How do you do, Mr. Stuart? I 'm very glad to see you again; but, if it 's a fair question, I should like to know what the devil you are doing here?" remarked this midnight assassin.

And five minutes later found them all riding on together along the Jezreel road. It was only a mile or so to camp; the Bedawy guide could walk; Stuart should take his horse. The fellow deserved some punishment for having frightened Miss Varley, Mr. Ferris averred politely. "Yes; we heard your shots. We thought some one was getting into trouble," the gentleman riding beside Constance remarked. "You will allow me to introduce my friend, Mr. Davenant?" said Ferris. In a few words Mr. Davenant explained the situation.

"I persuaded Ferris to come across by night. The men wanted to wait for the moon. But I thought it would be a finer sensation to see it rising from out the darkness and from behind the hills. It was really a very happy inspiration of Mr. Stuart's — that firing. Our men declared we were attacked by Bedaween. It gave us a fine, dramatic effect."

"Dramatic? It was dramatic enough, certainly," said Constance.

"But you were frightened, perhaps? Ah, you will appreciate the value of the sensation better when you look back at it. It was a point, don't you see? a situation; an accent. And next to having a great sorrow — which, of course, is the finest experience — I think accenting one's existence, multiplying one's emotions, heightening, intensifying the quality of one's sensations — "

Miss Varley turned and looked at her companion.

He had taken off his hat. The moonlight streamed full and clear upon his face. That face was almost an anachronism. It was like one of Holbein's portraits; a pale, large-featured, individual; a peculiar, an interesting countenance, of singularly mild yet ardent expression. Mr. Davenant was very young — probably not more than one or two and twenty; but he looked younger. He wore his hair rather long, thrown back, and clustering about his neck like the hair of a mediæval saint. He spoke with rapidity, in a low voice, with peculiarly distinct enunciation; he spoke like a man who made a study of expression. He listened like one accustomed to speak.

"But a great sorrow, Mr. Davenant — "

"Ah, that is the supreme experience, of course; overpowering sorrow suppresses civilization; it links a man to all the eternal verities of life. If I were a mother," said the young man, fervently, "if I were a mother, I should wish to have at least one of my sons meet with a tragic, a heroic death. I should wish him to be slain in battle. There would be something so sublime in one's despair. Great sorrow — perhaps great joy — " The horse stumbled and recovered himself cleverly.

"There he goes! Davenant never will attend to what he is doing. He 's been off twice to-night already," said Ferris, with a laugh.

"Can't ride?"

"Oh, forgets all about it! Thinks of something he 's

been reading, and mistakes his horse for a bookcase for all I know."

"What is he — English?"

"Oh, yes; an Oxford man. Young Oxford, and all that sort of thing, don't you know? A sort of early Christian brought down to date, and adapted — like a restored church. But a capital fellow, for all that. We've been travelling together for the last six weeks, and the more I know him the more I — Davenant! I say, Davenant!"

"Well?"

"That's the turn there — to the left."

"Oh, very well," said Mr. Davenant. He went on talking to Constance. He was speaking to her of Greece, of Athens — the city of the early morning — rising in the cool, pale, steady light of dawn, a new Aphrodite, from out the lapping circle of the waves. He spoke to her of the Parthenon, the one temple — not a building — a temple, as complete, as personal, as a statue. And that first sight of the Acropolis, the delicate, naked columns rising up in the morning sunshine: "It was like coming upon some white Greek goddess. It made one feel — "

"Hurrah! I see a light. Yes, there are the tents!" cried Stuart, pressing forward. And there indeed was camp, and loud-mouthed welcome from Lione, and all the rumor and excitement of return.

"Hassan is still out looking for you. O Constance, I have been so anxious! I have been quite wild; ask Tom. And Shaitan has come home without his saddle; I thought I should faint when I saw him coming in. Tom wanted to go and look for you, but of course I would not let him go. I cannot endure to be left alone," said Fanny, sinking back into her chair. "Thank you, Mr. Ferris; oh, never mind the cushion now. I am sure," she said, smiling very sweetly, and leaning her graceful little head against the chair, "I am sure that you fortunate people who have no nerves — "

"But perhaps Mr. Ferris will stay and dine with us,

Fanny. Oh, your tents are close by, next door in fact. It won't be any trouble to you, and I 'm sure we shall be very happy to have you stay — and your friend," the Major interposed eagerly.

And after dinner this eagerness was explained. "I have not brought any thing with me really. That portfolio? oh, there is nothing much in that," Mr. Ferris had answered with some reluctance. He had been turning over a pile of the Major's drawings for the last half-hour, with civil and appropriate commentary. And Davenant was never of any use on an emergency like this.

But presently, as Mrs. Thayer was rapturously and quickly examining the contents of the portfolio: "Those are worth looking at. I had forgotten I had them with me," he said, and leaned over and laid some sheets of drawing-paper on the table. "Designs for two companion pictures — the Plain of Esdraelon, you see. They are by — by a friend of mine; a man I know in Damascus."

"Ah, yes; I see. Not your own work then," said Fanny, and passed them by with charming *nonchalance.*

"Will you show them to me?" said Constance.

Both were unfinished sketches. The first was a study of a woman — a low-browed Syrian peasant-woman — standing in the doorway, one strong arm thrust behind her, dragging together the black folds of the tent. A little child was clinging, unheeded, by her side. Beyond the figure stretched the level fields, and all her face was lighted up with the strange glow of an unseen sunset — that thin, common face transfigured, grown terrible and wild with recollection of past and ineffaceable horror.

And underneath the drawing was written: "And Sisera said unto her, Stand in the door of the tent, and it shall be, when any man doth come and inquire of thee, and say, Is there any man here? that thou shalt answer, No."

Constance drew a long breath. She looked up. "I like it," she said simply.

"And this," said Ferris — "will you know what this one means?"

It was the same low-lying plain, by night. A wild, tumultuous sky, torn with sharp lines of stormy light; a dark hill-ridge; the uncertain outline of a tall, muffled figure, "taller than any other of the people from the shoulders and upward;" and, farther on, two other shadows stealing through the night. And next to it, roughly divided off by a mere charcoal scratch across the paper, another study of the principal figure. A man's face, looking out against the dawn — large, noble features, with eyes shadowed by the falling folds of the Arab head-dress, with proud and patient mouth; a young and kingly face, grown pale and wan with suffering and great weariness, and strange foreshadowing of doom.

George Ferris was very much pleased with the girl's manner of examining this work. Hitherto he had not paid very much attention to her perhaps; but now he turned and favored her with a perfectly respectful and perfectly exhaustive survey. Few details escape the interested eye of an artist; but for all that, the next morning he became convinced that there had been still another discovery to make.

It was still very early in the morning. The fresh and dewy fields were hardly shining yet in the first level rays of the sun; a thin, blue smoke was only now beginning to float above the double line of tents, and the air was yet cool with the coolness of night.

But lower down the hill there was plenty of sound and life and confusion — a noisy, clattering circle of baggage-mules, jangling with bells and gay with colored trappings, crowding thirstily about the flower-choked well; and nearer camp, a long line of horses were being driven up the road. The young men stood and criticised them as they trotted by.

"That wasn't a bad nag of yours — the one you lent me last night, Ferris."

"The sheikh has a better one, though. Those fel-

lows always get the best of every thing," said Ferris, philosophically.

"Hollo! why, they are saddling Miss Varley's horse already! We seem to be going to make an early start of it this morning," said Jack.

They walked over through the wet grass to where the grooms were bringing out the saddles.

"The fact is, Hassan, you ought to be most uncommonly obliged to me for not having massacred you in cold blood last night," Stuart remarked conversationally.

Hassan seemed very much offended.

"Well, sir, I've been dragoman thirty years, sir; and my father, he dragoman before me — "

"Oh, was he, though? That explains. I could not for the life of me imagine where you had got hold of such a precious lot of rotten old saddles; but of course, if they're family relics — I say, just tell that man to mind what he's about, will you? Those girths are not half properly strapped."

"Miss Constance knows how to ride," said Hassan sulkily.

"Miss Constance shall not run the chance of being thrown while *I* can help it," said the young man coolly. "And what is that?"

It was a bit of black ribbon hanging down from Miss Varley's saddle.

"Oh, I see. The thing I used last night to mend your jolly old strap," he said, indifferently. He hesitated a moment, patted the horse on the neck, unfastened the ribbon, and put it deliberately in his pocket.

"A wise provision against future contingencies is the test of the sage," observed Ferris, gravely, knocking the ashes out of his pipe.

"Oh, I don't know; it may be useful," said Jack, in a very off-hand manner.

Mr. Ferris smiled. He had drawn his conclusions.

And, still in the early morning, they set out for Nazareth. To-day, for the first time, the crimson and white and gold of the flowers was relieved by patches of

tall, pale primroses. And then, beyond the stony mountain-path, they came upon the ancient cacti hedges girdling about the town. So old are they, so massive and impenetrable is the close rampart of their flat-palmed branches, they seem to have been there from the very beginning of things, and to have started from the mother nursery of some elder world. Like some unholy genii — cruel, inactive, unfamiliar — they stare weirdly out at the life defiling before them, century after century. They bear an uncanny fruit the native children relish. "But then, have we not seen them eating grass?" asks Fanny, with a yawn. It has been a long ride, and Mrs. Thayer is tired. They leave the bleak and stony defile behind them, they climb the road, they come full upon this small, gray village spread upon the hillside; and still they can feel nothing but its insignificance, its barrenness, its dirt.

And later on, with the tents pitched on high ground near the olive-grove — looking down upon the convents, upon the church-roofs, the huddled houses, the long, blank road that seemed to be leading nowhere — this same impression endures.

And it is only at night, when the shadows have massed and simplified the broken outlines of the small, pale hills — it is only at night, when a yellow sunset is dying away behind the distant mountains; when the voices of the women by the Virgin's Fountain come floating softly up through the silent, gray evening, and the air is sweet with the smell of the small common flowers in the grass — it is only then, I say, that they can feel any charm in melancholy, abject Nazareth.

Once more they started in the early morning. Once more they saw the Mediterranean — a deep, blue line between the mountain summits of the farther range — once more they rode across the plains. And what a lovely dream is spring in that most lovely country! The flower-covered slopes rose up before them, breaking in billows of color against the tender sky; white cranes started from the tall grass through which they

waded ; from far-off woods the cuckoo's voice came thin and floating on the wind.

And all day long they rode in strange and silent solitude. From Nazareth to Galilee is but deserted space. Only, at long intervals, you see or pass some lonely village, perched like a well-guarded nest on the edge of the precipice ; and then again for miles and miles of sunny silence it is as though some mighty storm-wind had swept all life away — with Nature left, the only sovereign of space.

The afternoon was waning when they came in sight of the Sea of Galilee. The great flanks of the hills dropped down, somewhat abruptly, to the lake. The whole character of the landscape was large and simple and bare ; no trees breaking the great, flowing lines of the hills. After a somewhat rapid descent — too rapid for Fanny's heavy palanquin — they came upon the flat stretch of sand reaching to the old walls, the crumbling towers of Tiberias. The old city has shrunk to a few squalid huts, rising brokenly above the fields of burning bloom ; and without the curiosity of passing through it the little cavalcade pushed on to where the camp had been pitched by the shore of the lake, some half-hour's ride beyond the town.

It was a memorable ride to Constance. It was by Galilee! The sad, gray water lapped the shore ; the Moabite hills rose low against a sad, gray sky ; the air was a little chilly — just enough to make you shrink into yourself. They were all tired ; no fund of animal spirits was left, and precisely on this account — because physical being was so quiescent — mind and spirit rose unobstructed by the mere accidents of travel, and were left to brood, as it were, over the few great facts that consecrate the hill-slopes and the Sea of Galilee.

Constance looked about her on that quiet evening, over the idle wavelets along the lonely shore, to the cold shade of the nearer hills, thrusting their rocky flanks into the very water. She tried to realize the serene presence of the Galilean — the simple fishermen — the

storm on the lake — the sleeping master — the disciple sinking in the waves. She thought of the eager multitudes pouring out of that crowded city where now only the flowers of the field flaunted and flamed above the ruined walls. An infinite sadness filled her soul — the sadness of youth, of nature, of religion — the helpless stretching out of feeble hands. She looked abstracted; her impassioned, wide-eyed glance wandered from shore to shore, from sea to sky, unmindful of her companions. She felt for the moment alone. Could she hear that voice? Could her spirit know the presence of that Divine Goodness who walked and taught in the shadow of these everlasting hills, by the waters of that plashing sea? The very doors of her being seemed open to all the infinite possibilities of faith.

It was but for a moment, but in such moments the soul grows. Touched with tenderness, athirst for something to satisfy it, exalted by poetry and religion, she stood by the waters of Galilee.

CHAPTER XIV.

SCHÖN-ROHTRAUT.

THE lake-shore was covered with long, white rows of tents.

"Oh, I think we shall find a great many people here to-day," said Fanny, with a pleased expression in her eyes.

She drew back the curtain of the litter; picked up a book that had fallen; settled her cuff; put her hat straight upon her head. "If you will take away those flowers from the mules' harness, Tom? I don't want to look like a picnic."

Some ladies were crossing the beach to their encampment. They looked up curiously as the new comers

came in sight; and, even at this distance, there was something familiar in the aspect of the stout, gray dresses, the strong and serviceable white umbrellas they carried in their hands.

"It is — it must be — Constance, it *is* the Vaughan-Smythes!" said Fanny, springing to her feet. And then there followed much hand-shaking and loud recognition and greeting by the shore.

"But you must have travelled very fast to have overtaken us?" Mrs. Vaughan-Smythe remarked that evening to Mrs. Thayer. "As for ourselves, Mahmoud has turned out to be a perfect treasure so far. We have enjoyed our trip so much. We have saved twelve hours already. Twelve hours, without counting the three Sundays, since we left Jerusalem. You make it a point to stop over every Sunday, of course?"

And Fanny smiled amiably in reply.

"Oh, we have had such adventures!" she said, in her clear, rapid treble; "oh, dear Mrs. Smythe, if you could only have been with us yesterday!"

"Yes; it is very interesting, of course. We have been here ever since four o'clock. We wanted to come early to secure the best places and make sure of having fish for breakfast to-morrow. Of course that is what one thinks of first at Galilee — the fish," Miss Adela Smythe was saying to Constance.

"And when did you leave Nablous then, Mr. Stuart?" the pretty sister asked Jack.

"Nablous? Let me see. This is Friday — what, Saturday, is it? Ah, well then, we left Nablous four days ago. We got there on a Monday morning."

"On Monday morning? But you *must* have been travelling Sunday to reach there so soon," said their hostess, in very positive fashion.

Fanny smiled. She was intensely annoyed. "For one never can tell what they will think of us for doing it," she complained to Tom in the privacy of their own tent.

The Major was not sympathetic. "It was all a difference of nationality," he said deliberately, eying his wife

with some amusement. Fanny should have remembered that the Smythes were English, and that an Englishman would as soon leave his bath-tub at home as his conscience. "They haven't our loose, easy, American fashion of travelling without baggage, and keeping a running account with Providence," said the Major, philosophically. And Fanny was very much offended.

The next day was Sunday. "She was going to hear service — they were all going to hear service — in the Vaughan-Smythes' tent," she remarked coldly. "If they were heathens, as Tom seemed to infer — and, indeed, the way I hear you talking to Constance sometimes would make one believe you were not far wrong — if they were heathens," Mrs. Thayer said with plaintive emphasis, "at least — at least it could not be said she ever neglected to take advantage of such opportunities as came in her way."

And "*That* you don't, my dear," said the Major with a grin.

It was, perhaps, in consequence of this conversation, that the Thayer party were so very punctual the next morning.

"How do you do? ah, Mr. Stuart, how are you? I did not see you before. Fine weather, isn't it? Yes; we shall have quite a little congregation this morning. Brought your camp-stools with you, I hope? That's right — that's right," said Mr. Smythe, weightily, holding out his large, white hand.

Mr. Smythe was a large, portly man, of severe aspect and indefinite mind. But this latter fact was of the less consequence to him, possibly, that it did not prevent his possessing large, regular features, regular whiskers, a lofty, shining forehead, and a large, sonorous voice — an imposing combination of attributes which had long since caused him to adopt a parliamentary career. He had the reputation of being very popular in the House.

Miss Adela greeted the new comers with momentary enthusiasm. "Oh, did you have fish for breakfast?" she asked, eagerly.

"No," said Constance, smiling.

"No? Only fancy! Why, our dragoman got up before daylight to secure it; he said he had bought it all."

"Ah, Mahmoud is a sharp fellow," said her father with decorous exultation.

And presently the service began.

From the place where Constance sat she could see the rippling play of the water, foaming and breaking about a bed of small shells, worn thin and white by the waves; and, far across the lake, floated a vision of solemn mountain summits, lifting one above the other, crowned with the radiant morning light. Involuntarily her attention wandered. She glanced about the room. She caught Stuart's eye, and a half smile passed over her lips at sight of his sleek, brushed head and general expression of decorous melancholy. She looked at the doorway where Mahmoud sat in respectful discomfort. "We were determined to have a Christian dragoman for the Holy Land," said Mrs. Vaughan-Smythe, "and we got him quite as cheap." And then a wistful look stole into the beautiful eyes gazing out at that peaceful sea.

It was now about ten o'clock. The thin, gray mist had lifted from the lake, a cool, light breeze ruffled the water to a deeper blue; through the voice of the reader she could hear, quite plainly, the low wash of the waves upon the shore. Some one proposed a walk after the service. There were more people out upon the beach, and they strolled by more than one family group picking flowers for remembrance, or busily collecting shells. But presently they had left the line of tents behind them, and now they entered on a long and lonely stretch of sand.

Perhaps it was this very loneliness which prompted them to look with something more than ordinary curiosity at a tall and solitary figure, dressed in black, seated upon a rock, her head resting upon her hand, gazing out to sea. There was a great expression of sadness on the pale, fine features and in the listless pose.

"What a beautiful face, and how unhappy!" said Constance, with quick sympathy.

"It is Lady Janet Blank. No, I do not know her — personally. She has had a great deal of trouble with her husband, I hear; and I fancy there is something, ah — something rather *fishy* about her," said Mrs. Vaughan-Smythe, with a deprecatory smile.

"Ah," said Fanny, gravely; "ah, really. How very painful. So glad you warned me of it. Constance — Miss Varley — was speaking to her little girl only this morning. And one can never be too careful, you know."

"Poor thing!" said Constance in her gentlest voice. She looked up at the brilliant gladness of the day, and back at the lonely figure on the shore of that sea where the weak, the helpless, the sinking had heard the voice of a Friend. "Poor thing, I should like to ask her — "

"My dear Constance!"

"But really, Miss Varley, you know — "

"What, don't you mean to stop at Magdala, Mr. Stuart? Only fancy! Why, I would not miss Magdala for any thing."

"Because of Mary Magdalene? But surely wasn't there something rather *fishy* about her?" inquired Constance gravely.

Miss Smythe looked up in genuine surprise.

"Oh, really, you Americans are so very odd, you know."

And her father quite agreed with her.

"A very worthy people, my dear; young — very young — but worthy. I will not say — I should hesitate to say — they are a nation without a future," said that gentleman magnanimously; "but there is a shocking spirit of levity about the true American; an entire absence of weight, you mark me — of weight — which — ah, which — They are a glib people, I don't deny it, but essentially slight, my dear, essentially slight. They have no real conversation; not what I call conversation," said Mr. Smythe.

He spoke with some asperity, and his words were

followed by appropriate silence. It was only after a long pause that his wife looked up from her book.

"Very good dinner we had to-day, my dear," she observed thoughtfully.

"Very, my dear, very," said Mr. Vaughan-Smythe in his most sonorous tones.

It was early the next morning when Constance came out of her tent. The weather had changed for the worse. There was a wan and chilly light on the mountains now, the air was cold and still, and the only sound in the morning was the moan of the gray and restless sea. But even if the young day came in pale and colorless, there was plenty of light and resolution in the face of the girl as she clambered about the rocks, or sat down on the sands by Lione and filled her lap with flowers.

This was how the Major found her, coming up with young Stuart from their morning plunge in the lake. He stopped to look at her with a certain pleasure in his face.

"Well, you look wide awake enough," he observed approvingly. "Fanny not dressed yet, I suppose? Well, I will go and call her. Now mind you don't keep breakfast waiting, Constance, there 's a good girl," he said, walking off through the tall, wet grass.

"Do you intend not to say 'good-morning' to me at all, then?" demanded Mr. Stuart.

Constance smiled.

"I 'm extremely happy this morning," she said inconsequentially. "Now — at last — I feel as though we were really going to Damascus. I shall get some letters there. I shall get two, perhaps three, letters from my father — "

"But you haven't said 'good-morning,' to me yet," said Jack.

She had been busy fastening a great yellow marigold in Lione's collar, but now she lifted up her face, and he could see the careless, friendly look in her eyes and the faint, fresh color the sea-wind had brought to her cheek.

"This Syrian air must disagree with me; I believe I

am growing rude," she answered gravely. "Good-morning, Mr. Stuart. There, that is the great disadvantage of society — people are always making comparisons. Now, if you had not spent your afternoon yesterday flirting with that pretty Miss Smythe, why, perhaps you might never have discovered how bad even my manners can be."

"Miss Smythe!"

"Oh, Miss Smythe is very pretty. I think she is a very nice girl," said Constance. "I like English girls; I like —"

"You like talking nonsense, I think," he interrupted coolly.

"Well, at least I don't deny my tastes," she answered frankly. "But, really now, I don't see why you should call it nonsense; I really don't see why you should not flirt with Miss Smythe, or fall in love with Miss Smythe, if —"

She had been speaking almost at random, but now she checked herself suddenly, and there was an expression of embarrassment in her eyes. She glanced up timidly at her companion. The young man had turned away his head. There was a curious look on his face, as he stood biting his lip and staring at the pale and restless water.

"No; I never supposed you did see it," he answered shortly.

It seemed a long way back to the tents.

The shores of the lake are absolutely deserted. As they rode, an hour later, by the ruined battlements of Tiberias — only invested now by scarlet poppies or the waving grass — a few miserable old Jews crawled out of their hovels to gaze at the travellers, then with some mysterious murmur of imprecation slunk back to their hiding-holes. Not a house was to be seen on either shore; nothing but deep, misty ravines filled with shifting, blue shadows; no sound but the sullen beating of the surf.

As the path wound higher and higher they could see,

at every bend of the leafy road, the wide, gray loneliness of the mountain-girdled sea. And once — quite suddenly — they came upon a wandering caravan of pilgrims — men and women and children, clad in strange and beautiful garments: a sudden, brilliant burst of vivid color and gaily-caparisoned horses and flashing arms. They passed each at foot-pace in the narrow pathway. And then a sudden silence fell upon the noisy train; the men looked warily to their merchandise, the women folded themselves more tightly in their veils: it was the silent negation of an alien race.

And now indeed they seemed entering into the very heart of solitude; for now they had left behind them the mournful swamps of Magdala, its ruined mill and the shallow, brawling river where all day long the clustering oleanders flaunt their frail rosy beauty in the sun; and on and on they rode by silent paths, through long, wild stretches of leafy solitudes, or out into the empty, open fields between the yellow primroses and the soft silver-gray of the sky.

And on the second day they reached the swamps of Huleh. A primitive grandeur marks the long, swelling lines, the mountain barrier of that desolate, unclaimed land.

Once, towards evening, they came upon a camp of Bedaween. The small "black tents of Kidar," looked like black bats flattened against the ground. The men were in the pastures with the cattle; a low-browed woman, with shining silver ornaments about her wrists and hair, offered to sell them some milk as they passed through the village; some thin, brown-skinned children sprang from the road and fled with shrill, wild outcry to the shelter of the tents; and gaunt and famished pariah dogs pursued them with loud-throated menace far into the open fields. And then one night came the first revelation of Mount Hermon, rising in snow-crowned solitude, far off against the roseate sky. They were camping beside a nameless lake, where big, brown buffaloes trooped slowly down through the sedge to drink,

and the reedy shore was for a moment transfigured into a network of gold by the magical weaving of sunset. Then night crept over the land — chill, homeless night, with the wailing of wind and the sense of desolation.

It was the next day they reached Banias.

But even in this brief interval, a change had come over the spirit of the little party. As Constance said, it seemed at last that they were really going to Damascus; something of the city's restraint made itself felt. And now, indeed, they could already look forward to the end of this free and careless journeying, and more than one of them secretly questioned what that end should be. It is true that when Fanny attempted to give these questions a more tangible expression, she met with but small success.

"How can I tell you what I mean to do, Fanny? What do I know of it myself? You take it for granted that I am thinking always of what — of what other people would like," the girl said, somewhat bitterly; "but is there nothing ever coming to me out of life? Am I never to think, to expect, to live, for myself?"

It was a settled conviction of Mrs. Thayer's, that Constance was incapable of very deep emotion.

"You ought to marry some man with plenty of money, who would be very devoted to you and very indulgent; some one who could give you a good position," she argued seriously. "All those romantic and sentimental notions are quite out of place with your character, Constance. You 're the dearest girl in the world, you know, and I love you dearly; but I don't think you will ever break your heart over anybody much. And really, Constance, with your good sense — Tom always says you have more good sense than any woman he knows — and when you think of your father at home and all those children, and you with your habits and tastes, I don't know any one who needs to make a good marriage more than yourself, dear child," concluded Fanny, with unsparing frankness.

The girl was walking by the side of the palanquin,

but now she turned her head away, and Mrs. Thayer could only see the nervous trembling of her hands.

"There is Aunt Van, to be sure," continued that prudent little person; "of course, if you have really decided never to marry, Aunt Van will have to do something for you, I suppose. I dare say she would do it, even after that Stuyvesant affair. But living with Aunt Van! Why, surely, Constance —"

"It had not come to that yet. No, not yet;" the girl answered proudly, lifting up her eyes. And then, with sudden change of manner: "O Fanny," she said passionately, "be good to me; let me alone! I know — I know every thing you would say, dear, and it is all true, and you are good to say it, only — We have four days left, haven't we? and then Damascus, and Aunt Van. But those four days belong to me," said Constance.

It was not like her usual way of speaking. When Mrs. Thayer thought it over afterwards, she sighed and shook her head dubiously. There was something more here than met the eye, the little lady thought — something she could not understand.

And meanwhile they were climbing up to Banias. Climbing to the source of the Jordan, by sunny paths and through pale fields of wheat; by myrtle groves, and hoary old olives, lightning-shattered and gray. There was a delicate, continuous sound of running water in the air; marble columns and many a fallen capital were lying on the ground, deep hidden in tall weeds; and far above their heads, high on the mountain's slope, the crumbling citadel lifted its ruined towers.

And now, winding about the hillside, they pushed their way through a leafy covert of thorn and myrtle, to the secret woodland paths. Frail, white cyclamen grew in abundance in these moist recesses, and rank buttercups thrust their yellow blossoms through the branches to catch and hold each wandering gleam of sunshine. At last, pushing their way through the luxuriant branching, they came upon a little open glade where the stream widened to a pool. An oak-tree stretched its branches

clear across the river; beneath its shade the thicket drew back, leaving a little open space of smooth, green turf. And now the horses stood motionless, drinking in the water with the deep-drawn breathing of content. The little river foamed and splashed about their feet, to disappear some ten yards off under a tangle of blossom-whitened boughs.

Here, in the home of the great god Pan, they seemed to have discovered the most secret of his haunts. As Constance looked about her, the leaves overhead rustled suddenly as though stirred by the white hands of some dryad, "with a face like spring;" and the girl smiled to fancy that by lifting up her eyes she could meet the mischievous, startled gaze of some belated faun, or hear in the lift and fall of the splashing water the low laughter of the nymphs hidden amongst sharp-flowering rushes. And then as she looked about her she was struck with a sudden sense of the curious silence of the place. There was not the sound of a bird's song among the branches, not the flutter of a bird's wing across the blue. She listened. A sudden cloud passed over the April sky; the flower-crowned laurels flung their white arms wildly in the air; a sudden gust of wind shook all the sturdy branches of the oak, and hushed itself with a shivering sigh among the reeds. And through the sobbing of the water came a wild lament — Pan, Pan is dead!

It was at Banias that they again fell in with Ferris — at Banias and under the trees. The night was warm and still. They sat by the brink of the shadowy river, rushing wildly down from its sacred cave beside the ruined shrines; they watched it for a moment, flowing thin and clear adown that marble stairway which the footsteps of many a worshipper had pressed — they watched it, hastening downward through the shadows, and the moon, riding high above the tree-tops, whitened its foaming fall.

"Mr. Davenant," said Constance, looking vaguely up above her, "why is it that oak-trees seem so mediæval?

Why should they make one think of old crusaders and knights in armor, like some suggestion of an old romance?"

"Ah, I have felt that too," said Davenant gravely. "It is a gothic tree, don't you know? German in its spirit, I mean, not Greek."

"I know," said Ferris, —

> Einstmals sie ruhten am Eichenbaum
> Da lacht Schön-Rohtraut.

She looked up with a quick light on her face. "Oh, Mr. Ferris, do you know the rest of it? I have not heard that song — not for years," she said earnestly.

Ferris was very willing to please this girl. He made an effort to recollect the half-forgotten words; in a rough way he even translated them to Fanny. While the oak-trees rustled overhead in the silence, and the river leaped and whitened in the moonlight, he told them the story of Rohtraut — King Ringang's young daughter Rohtraut — beautiful Rohtraut — who all day long would neither spin nor sew, but only ride out into the wild, free wood. And the young page sighed that he too might become a hunter, and follow the beautiful girl into the wild, free wood. "And after a while," he went on, "after a little while, the young man came to Ringang's castle, in hunting-dress, and with a horse to hunt in the woods with Rohtraut. 'Oh that I were only a king! I love her so dearly, this beautiful Rohtraut; but be silent, my heart, be still!'"

In a rough and broken fashion he tried to tell them how one day — there came one day when they rested in the oak-forest, and how beautiful Rohtraut laughed. "Why do you look at me," she asks, "why do you look at me so longingly? Nay, if you have the courage you may kiss my beautiful lips." "Be silent, my heart, be still!"

And here was it only fancy that the trees whispered together more loudly through the windless night, and the torrent paused to listen in the moonlight, as he told

them how the young man trembled, and how he thought "she has allowed it," and how he kissed the beautiful girl upon her mouth? And then they ride so silently homeward, and there is wild delight in the young man's heart. "And though they made you into an empress to-day, what do I care for that? The thousand leaves in the wood they know it—they know that I have kissed her beautiful mouth. *Schweig stille, mein Herz, schweig stille!*"

"Ah!" said Davenant, slowly, "it is one of those songs that die away from their music. Do you remember Schubert's music, Miss Varley, and all the wild longing and passionate desire of that accompaniment? I never knew but one person who sang it well."

"It is a man's song, I suppose," said Stuart. "I have heard of it once before."

"I know a friend of Ferris's who sings it," the young man answered carelessly; "a countryman of yours, by-the-way, and an artist. His name—you may have heard of him, perhaps—is Lawrence—Denis Lawrence."

He happened to be looking at Constance as he spoke, and even in the uncertain light he could see the startled look in her face.

"Perhaps you know him, then?" he said.

The girl drew farther back into the shadow.

"I have not seen him, no, not for a long time," she said, with an effort; and it was not Davenant alone who noticed the steady suppression in her voice.

"Ah, well, Lawrence is a capital fellow," said Ferris, lightly. "I know him very well. We were together at the Beaux Arts, in Paris, once; I am going to meet him now—in a day or two. What," said the young man with some surprise, "is it possible you did not know that Lawrence is at Damascus?"

And all night long the river flashed, and foamed, and murmured beneath the whispering trees; and white stars came, and shone, and faded, until the timid dawn awoke in the east; the topmost branches of the aspen

blushed rosy-red, a bird called to its mate rapturously through the silence, and the river laughed with new joy for the new day.

And the desire of her heart had come to Constance.

CHAPTER XV.

DAWN.

ONCE already that night Hassan had been awakened by the fancied sound of footsteps prowling about the camp. Once already, when he had gone out hurriedly into the darkness, his camels'-hair abbas folded stiffly about him, and the wind ruffling his thin, gray hair, it was only to see the tranquil row of white tents shining peacefully in the moonlight, and to hear the vague sighing of the trees. But now, as he looked cautiously around him, something moved out there in the shadow; a dark figure was coming slowly towards him, lounging about in the moonlight, its hands in its pockets and a cigar in its mouth.

"What 's the matter, Hassan? Any thing up?" Stuart demanded in a low tone.

The young man laughed to scorn any suggestion that harm might come to him of this ghostly wandering.

"You go to sleep now, and let me alone. Catch the fever? That 's a likely story! and what the devil does it matter to you if I do? I tell you what it is, Hassan: the care of this family is getting to be too much for your brain. Now go to bed, there 's a good fellow, and don't bother. You 'd better go to sleep. This is a capital place for sleeping, you know. I stumbled over one of your guards a moment ago, and I 'm blessed if the fellow even winked," he said good-humoredly.

He walked down into the darkness, and stared at the swirling stream.

"She cares for me — she cares for me as I do for *that*," he thought, and tossed his cigar into the water, and saw the spark of fire sputter and go out.

The short summer night was well-nigh over; a light mist floated above the river; already the low moon paled against the paling sky.

"And those other fellows," he went on, thinking savagely; and there was perhaps none the less bitterness in his reflections that they took this unsentimental form; "those other fellows, with their pictures and poetry and stuff: is there one of them who knows her as I know her, or who would do what I would do for her, for a word — a look — any thing? They say I haven't any sentiment. Well, I don't understand German — that's true enough; but can't I be as spooney over a girl as any other fellow?"

He thought of other episodes in his experience. But which one of those girls could ever be compared to her? he asked himself, with cool ingratitude. Each little familiar trick and turn of expression rose up distinctly before him. There was one particular look of hers when any thing had pleased her, a look that came into her eyes —

He stood there so long that a bird began singing in the branches; there was a deepening glimmer of gold behind the trees, and of a sudden the river leaped and danced and glistened in the sun. He turned his head. Here — here she was, Constance herself, coming through the long grass to greet him, with spring in her face and white hands full of flowers.

A happy inspiration came to Stuart.

"Oh no, the others are not awake yet," he answered, somewhat eagerly. "Look here, Constance, suppose we don't wait for them? Let us, you and I, go up to the fountain together — Pan's Fountain, don't you know? There will be such a mob of people when the others are all there," he suggested artfully; "and I know you don't like mobs."

Constance laughed.

"I am ready. I am ready for any thing this morning," she said confidentially; and she looked at him with all the gladness of life in her face.

They went up. It was a steep and rugged path beneath the cliff, and the stones were still slippery with dew. The wet myrtle branches spattered a shower of raindrops and white petals in their faces as they pushed their way past; it would be hours before the sun entered these leafy thickets; but already high overhead the sheer wall of red granite burned redly in the morning light. And now they had reached the goatherd's terrace, and before them, deep in the heart of the mountain cavern, slumbered a dark and brimming pool.

The girl sat down on one of the fallen boulders; her companion threw himself beside her at her feet. They looked about them. It was a still morning. Some swallows flitted sharply past, clinging with low uneasy cries to the hanging water-plants overhead; the joyous river foamed from out the cavern, leaping wildly down through the leafy cleft to the valley beneath; below them the tall sycamores swayed slowly to and fro in the sunlight; there came a pleasant sound of the winged wind in the tops of the planes.

"Do you see those niches in the rock?" asked Stuart.

And then they both looked up at the empty shrines of the nymphs, shrines curved like some delicate shell of the sea. And on each but one of these forgotten altars grew some blooming plant, the last tribute perhaps of that eternal pagan, Nature, to her dead gods; not mere white lilies grew there, or the soft poppy with red leaves, but rather young anemones, the flower of golden-haired Venus, and inscribed leaves of hyacinth.

The ground was covered with low-creeping thyme; Constance dragged it off in wet handfuls from the dripping rocks to make a garland for that only empty shrine. And like two young Greeks, and with a fantastic seriousness, they hung the purple tribute in its place. "It might be," the girl said, smiling dreamily, "it might be that the old gods were not dead but only sleeping; and

who could tell what answer they would send? 'For the entrances of the elder world were wide and sure, and brought immortal fruit.'"

The wise, old goats had started off at sight of these strange faces, but now they came trooping boldly back, pushing their way to the water-splashed cave. And as these two young people turned again to descend to the valley, there was a sudden quick pattering of sharp feet among the stones, a black-faced ram with a long, white beard sprang nimbly on a boulder, and, planting his sharp feet firmly against the rock, he reached his venerable head towards the garland.

"Surely this is only the disguise of some old priest of Pan," the girl said, glancing back mirthfully. "See, Jack — see! he has actually reached it — "

Stuart was standing a step or two below her, and she touched his shoulder lightly to make him look up.

"Oh, yes, I see," he said in a vague fashion.

They went down a little farther. A brook crossed the pathway; the stones were slippery with water. It was a steep and difficult descent.

"Here, let me help you. It is much harder coming down. Give me your hand; I can lift you over," the young man said eagerly.

"Oh, I can spring," said Constance.

She stood balancing herself for a moment on the stone. The little torrent foamed and splashed about her feet; a sharp ray of sunshine pierced the leaves overhead and touched her hair and the delicate outline of her throat. Stuart looked at her.

"Oh, very well. But if you fall you will hurt yourself; and if you think I am going to let you have the chance of hurting yourself, why — why you are mistaken," he said with sudden audacity.

He walked back deliberately through the shallow water, and threw his arm about her waist and lifted her to the other side.

"Constance, are you very angry?" he asked. He bent down his head and kissed her on the cheek.

For an instant she stood quite still, startled into quiescence. She lifted up her face, and he in his turn was fairly disconcerted by the look of mute reproach in her eyes.

"I did not expect that from you, Jack," she said simply. Her lip trembled a little. "Will you let me pass?"

"I shall not let you pass," he said boldly; but there was more of entreaty than of defiance in his voice. "I shall not let you leave me so. Oh, I know that you have a right to be angry; but Constance, I could not help it, dear. I am so sorry. But you expect me to be with you, and see you, and talk to you, and never tell you a word of how I love you," he said doggedly, "and I can't do it — I won't. You should not ask a man to do the impossible."

The branches rustled beneath them, and there was a sound of approaching footsteps along the path.

"Oh, confound it all," he said impatiently, "here comes somebody — of course! And if you would only listen to me for a moment, Constance; if you will only say you are not — "

Well, it was an awkward meeting for everybody. "And if this was to be the result of early rising," Mr. Ferris remarked afterwards, "why, early rising was a mistake."

"I told you all along what would be happening," he said to Davenant; "I knew we should walk into the midst of some lovers' quarrel. And a nice mess it was we made!"

Which was the more ungrateful that it was Davenant himself who had saved the situation; Davenant — who looked upon Jack Stuart as a Philistine — who considered him in simple good faith as a mere incident, of no possible importance to art — and who now came forward and was the first to address Constance.

"Oh, Miss Varley," he said earnestly, "I wish you would come with me a moment. I want you to come and listen to this falling water. Do you know that there

was a marble temple here once — a fair, white temple to Pan ; and now the temple is gone, the god is gone, and there is only the river calling, calling from the secret places of the mountain. It is like the voice of the old gods of Hellas — like the love of the Greeks in a man's life — something luring and irresistible, and full of mysterious power."

"Yes ; I will come with you," said Constance, very quietly.

There was a burning and indignant flush on her cheeks, but she spoke quite steadily, and there was little of embarrassment or hesitation to be detected in her firm, proud bearing as she turned and walked away.

"Are you going up? Oh, well, I am going down," said Stuart. It was in no very enviable mood the young man returned to camp.

But how was it possible to cherish resentment long on such a morning? The hillside was a wilderness of joyously-running water-threads ; and as they rode away from camp the horses picked their way across a soaked and spongy soil. The hedges and bushes were ablaze with buds of every color, and flowers that breathed the odors of Paradise. There was a certain bush of myrtle in blossom which Constance will never forget — it was only three days' ride from Damascus. And how the birds sang that morning! The very rapture and fulness of life seemed looking at the girl from every flower along the pathway — seemed calling to her in every sound of running water and the singing of birds — seemed shining in the sunlight — seemed floating about her on every breath of the warm and fitful breeze.

She rode between Ferris and the Major. There was no end to the eager questions she asked. Should they reach Damascus in the morning or at evening? Could one see it from a long distance off? Was it a very large city? And here she bent over and busied herself with the adjustment of her reins.

"Not so large as Cairo? Oh, of course not. Cairo," Miss Varley said, "is a city where every one seems lost.

If you have friends there, and they are not staying at your hotel, it may be weeks before you see them at all."

The Major smiled. "I thought I heard you objecting once at the quantity of people Fanny made us know at Cairo?" he said.

But there was no difficulty of that kind at Damascus, Ferris observed carelessly. Miss Varley would find there was but one — at least one civilized — hotel.

And all day long they rode on much in this same fashion, climbing steadily higher over rich, green hill-slopes and under darkly-luxuriant trees, until it was almost as good as being in a park, Fanny observed approvingly. Mrs. Thayer was not in the habit of paying compliments to Nature. But with evening there came a change in the character of the landscape. They were fast approaching Mount Hermon, the ground had grown rocky, and already there was a snow-chill in the air, and a thin, bleak wind whistling about the tents. It was not an evening for much confidential discourse.

The next morning found them toiling through a labyrinth of rocky defiles, deep in the heart of the hills. It was an arid and shadowless country — a land of pale, barren slopes, where the grass grew thin and sear, crossed by a curious network of small, white paths, which meet and intersect, and part and climb again, like the curious tracery of lines on the rind of a melon — a sterile country, where the very rock-forms seem poor and trivial and meaningless. But presently the road narrowed to a track barely wide enough for a single horse. For an hour or more they wound their way along a steep, limestone gully, between two walls of towering rock. The day was terribly hot. The cruel sunshine glared pitilessly down upon the white rocks, the ground under foot was hard like iron. For a long time they rode on in silence, the very song of the muleteers was hushed. The horses plodded wearily forward, with spiritless, drooping heads, and then Lione would run on a few steps and lie down panting, trying vainly to crowd

himself beneath the prickly shade of the dead thorn-bushes, and startling the great lizards basking in the sun. Once a caravan from Damascus met and crossed their path — a line of muffled figures, silent and white — and exchanged a listless salute. And again there was nothing to be seen but the naked limestone walls, the cruel sunshine, and, overhead, the pitiless dark sky.

But now the Major, riding on in front, saw the horse before him raise his head, prick up his ears, and start forward with a low whinny of delight. The rocks turned sharply to the right, opened out, fell back; and now the heat and glare had vanished, for a cool snow-wind swept in their faces; and before them, across a stretch of level plain, the lord of mountains rose in white, resplendent majesty.

The track still wound upward, nearer and nearer to the edge of that snow. And presently small flowers and grasses started up beside the pathway; a little brook sprang suddenly from behind a granite boulder and ran singing along the road; a flock of big, brown goats ran bleating before the horses, and they entered a narrow valley all silvery with olive-trees.

Here they dismounted for the noonday halt. It was a silent and a peaceful spot. The little brook babbled softly to itself among the grasses; the wind lifted and stirred the silvery-gray leaves overhead; a brindled old sheep-dog, with a gentle, sagacious face, left his flock upon the hillside and came and made friends with Constance. He even followed her as she strolled slowly along the brook; he watched her gather flowers; he gave a low growl of warning, and placed himself protectingly before her, when, leaning against an olive tree, his hands in his pockets, and his hat well over his eyes, they chanced unexpectedly upon Jack.

He had not heard them coming, and now, as he started and looked up at the sheep-dog's bark, there was something so dejected in his attitude, an expression of such dumb, half-understood trouble upon the handsome, sunburned features, that Constance never hesitated for a

moment. She went impulsively forward; she held out her hand.

"We— There isn't any reason we should not be good friends, Jack, is there?" she said in her gentle voice.

And however incoherent Stuart's answer may have been, there was still a certain blunt earnestness about it which touched her to quite a singular degree. For, "There is nothing I would not do — I would rather cut my hand off than offend you," the young man assured her wildly; "and you — you have hardly spoken to me for these two days." And Constance was moved with something almost like remorse as she thought of the beautiful dreaming in which those two days had passed. To a noble, to a sensitive nature, it is often in this very power which it possesses over another that lies the secret of its heaviest bond. She looked at him, and there was an expression of wistful trouble he had surely never seen in that frank, clear glance before.

"I am sorry," she answered sadly. "Sometimes — sometimes I think I ought to tell you, Jack —"

A hot flush came over her face. She left the sentence unfinished, and turned abruptly away.

And still the little brook babbled softly to itself among the grasses; the flickering sunshine came and went with the stirring of the leaves; the brindled sheep-dog followed their gestures with his gentle, intelligent eyes, and Stuart wondered in silence over this strange, this delicious new shyness in his companion. "Could it be possible?" the young man asked himself. He felt his pulse beat faster at the very supposition. A wild, new hope, vague and wordless and strong, had awakened, was even now stirring in his heart. When he rejoined the others a moment later, there was no one present who did not feel the contagion of his impetuous high spirits and content. He even endeavored to encourage art; he asked Ferris to explain the mechanism of his sketching-box; he listened with perfect complacency to Davenant's remarks.

"I know a man who has made the ascent of Mount Hermon," that young gentleman was saying; "he went up to explore for temples. Do you know that there are places here, in this very Lebanon, where the sun-worship is as living, the rites as sacred, as in the old days of Nineveh?"

And as the spring wind rustled among the branches, and fleet cloud-shadows passed across the sunny grass, they lay beneath the olive-trees, looking out upon the sacred mountain — the lonely mountain where, from the Druse with his half-Egyptian mysteries, to the Greek, to the Mahomedan, to the Jew — from Astarte to Christ — there is not a religion, not a faith, not a practice, but has found shelter amid the inviolate sanctity of its snows.

It was night when they reached Rasheiya. For the first time in many days the camp was pitched within the limits of a town. There was something strange, almost impressive in these long, low lines of silent houses, in these dark and narrow streets where the horses' feet awoke a hollow echo from the stones.

The tents were ranged around a lofty terrace set about with a low wall; and after dinner Constance slipped out unnoticed, and came and leaned upon this parapet. The night was moonless, but high overhead there was a white glimmer of snow under the stars, and the air had a sharp edge to it as it swept coldly down from those bleak and lonely heights. It was almost the first moment Constance had been alone that day. Now, as she stood in this silent darkness, looking out from the mountain-side across the shadowy stretch of plain, a great trouble and longing were in her heart. She looked out to the far horizon: somewhere in that darkness, a short day's journey off, lay the city of her dreams. But somehow, in these last moments a deep, shrinking distrust had stolen into her very soul. She remembered the last time she had seen Lawrence; the manner of their parting: she thought with a sort of despair of the years that had rolled between. All

doubts, all fears, all hesitations seemed to take form and substance in this chilly darkness.

She looked about her. The uncertain silhouette of the town rose up in dark confusion against a clear, cold sky. She listened, and with a superstitious tremor she heard the wailing note of a bugle borne faintly on the wind from the barracks which crown the hill. For the moment, all her fine, high-strung courage had vanished, had given place to some wild presentiment of woe; for the moment she absolutely dreaded the idea of Damascus.

She stood there so long that her dog, who had followed her from the tent, grew impatient; he came closer to her; he pushed his cold nose into her hand and whined. And surely there must have been something reassuring in the very touch of this unexpected companionship, for now she turned suddenly and knelt down beside him, and laid her cheek against his delicate head.

"Lione," she said with childish earnestness, "tell me, Lione, how will it end?" She looked wistfully out into the darkness. "I have waited so long," she said, "I have been so patient —"

The dog whined again and looked up in her face and laid his paw on her hand. Some one threw back the door of the tent; a stream of light poured out into the night, and a voice called "Constance!" And presently Constance came. She came in very quietly; she sat down beside the table; she took up a book. When Fanny made some remark she answered it. But she was very silent all the evening, and Stuart remembered afterward how pale she was, and how she did not give him her hand as they bade each other "Good-night."

"Mrs. Thayer," said Davenant, reining up his horse beside her, late on the following afternoon, "Mrs. Thayer, do you know that in five minutes more we shall have reached the road?"

It was the first road they had seen since leaving Jerusalem, and the very horses seemed impressed with this

evidence of approaching civilization. They hesitated; they stood still; they stepped daintily down upon this smooth, white surface. With one accord they threw up their heads and went off at a mad gallop beneath the overhanging cliffs. And now they passed a small wooden station where men with Arab faces and French livery came out to stare at them as they cantered on; and now a rumbling, clattering diligence rolled ponderously by.

"Are you sorry to be back in the world again?" asked Ferris, with a smile. He had taken a good deal of artistic interest in watching Miss Varley's face these last two days. As a general rule Mr. Ferris cared very little for women.

This was to be the last camp — at Dimas. As they got off their horses in front of the white row of tents it was with a certain feeling of reluctance. The pleasant, familiar life was at an end.

It was only a bare and colorless desert which stretched before them now — a low and solitary and undulating waste, set about with blank gray rocks. But, as if to consecrate with some peculiar beauty these last hours of their nomad life, a wonderful sunset shone and flamed behind the barrier of those pale, ashen peaks. The young men brought out an armful of Turkish rugs after dinner. They spread them before the tents, along the terrace-wall; they smoked, they drank their coffee, they watched the slow and splendid procession of the clouds.

Somehow the conversation had fallen upon Lawrence.

"By-the-way, George," said Davenant, suddenly, "it won't be much of a joke, will it, if you get back to Damascus only to find that Lawrence has left?"

"Well, no. Particularly as I have got those sketches with me. But — Oh, he will be there fast enough," said Ferris confidently.

"I 'm not so sure about that. We agreed to be only a fortnight, you know; and it 's more than three weeks —"

"What, you think he will be gone then? I hope not. I should be sorry to miss seeing Lawrence again. But

where did he think of going to, any way?" asked the Major.

Mr. Ferris was engaged in lighting his cigar. It was an act requiring some deliberation in this high wind, which was perhaps the reason of his delay in answering.

"Oh — it 's only some nonsense of Davenant's," he said uneasily; "Lawrence thought something of going to Persia once. He never meant it."

"Oh, didn't he though?" said Davenant. "Why, I saw the beautiful — "

Ferris turned on his elbow and looked at him.

"It is a pity the ladies are missing all this sunset," he remarked quietly. "I never saw a finer one. Ah, there they are at last."

He got up and offered his place to Constance. The talk drifted in another way.

But somehow Davenant seemed possessed with one idea. They had been speaking of the ruined temples, and some one had observed how strange it was that there never should have been any expression of plastic art in Judæa.

It was easy enough to understand, the young Englishman averred boldly. For what was the existence of plastic art but an admission of a sense of the regnant force of physical beauty? What was Greek art itself but a recognition that beauty is a form of goodness? And what was Christianity but the passionate pleading and protest of the suffering soul against the pagan idea?

"For my part, I would rather not be merely an angel," said Mr. Davenant; "I love the earth. When I die I should wish to be like one of the old Hellenic shades, still rejoicing and sorrowing over the fortunes of my race — full of sad wisdom and pity unutterable."

"But really, Mr. Davenant — ! " said Fanny.

"That has nothing to do with it, of course," the young man said, evidently following out his own line of thought. "But how could you expect an expression of pure art from a mixed people? How could Syria produce any thing but a literature, when every civilization of the old

world — Assyrian, Persian, Egyptian, Indian — had poured their science, their legends, and their influence over the land? If you destroy the purity of the race, you have set the death-seal on the possibility of a pure and distinctive art."

"Now hold on a moment, Davenant. I protest as an American — "

"As an American, my dear boy, you merely serve to illustrate my theory. Why, look here. If you want a case in point, take Lawrence. We were speaking of Lawrence before you came, Miss Varley — "

"Yes?" said Constance.

She was leaning on her elbow, playing with the amber beads about her wrist. But now she looked up and listened.

"He is half a Frenchman, you know. At least, his mother's family was French — "

"Southerners."

"Well, French Southerners then. They had French blood in them at all events. And what is the consequence? Why, Lawrence is born a cosmopolitan. His feelings, his sympathies — "

"A cosmopolitan? That is to say, a man belonging to nowhere in particular. A cosmopolitan! Why, I 'd sooner be a flying-fish," said Jack.

CHAPTER XVI.

AFTER MANY DAYS.

DAVENANT looked back; there was a great light of enthusiasm on his face.

"'For are not Abana and Pharpar,'" he said, "'are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel?'"

They had left Dimas in the early morning, and already

the sky was paling with the noonday heat. It was a strange country they were passing through. For hours they had ridden across the short, dead turf of the plain beside a blank, white road. It was a land of vast rolling slopes — the dark, reddish soil broken here and there by the ploughman's furrow. A country bare of vegetation, shadowless, naked, vast, and grand, because of two grand things — simple forms and solitude.

It was some time now since they had left the baggage-train behind them; the slow-moving palanquin had dwindled to a mere black spot, crawling along the road.

"It was a capital idea to make you ride this morning," the Major told his wife.

"Look here, Constance, I wish you would be reasonable and change horses with either Ferris or me," Mr. Stuart observed confidentially; "that brute shies; why, he jumps across the road at the shadow of a leaf!"

"Yes," said Constance absently. "But I like Shaitan," she said, turning her face towards him with a smile.

There was a singular elegance and precision about her every gesture that morning. The young man noted with a certain surprise that she moved more slowly. She spoke little, but her gentle voice seemed to have grown clearer, more bell-like in tone, and tense, like the tense cord of an instrument. Her very riding-dress was adjusted with more than usual care.

"Can you fancy being so excited over the mere approach to a city, — a city where there is no society nor any thing?" Mrs. Thayer asked Ferris with an indulgent smile.

They had passed the last mail-station, and now there came a descent, an unexpected turn in the long and weary road. A bald and sun-scorched cliff rose up on either side; the reflected heat was intense; they had left the grass, and the dust was rising in choking clouds about the horses' feet.

And now Davenant looked back.

A sudden turn in the road; a sudden rush of streams;

coolness and shade — the sense of running water and the shade of trees — slow-swaying poplars and leafy walnuts, and the sunlight shining through pale apple-blooms.

"'For are not Abana and Pharpar,'" the young man said, "'are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel?'"

The river foamed and whitened under overhanging branches; the cliffs towered up higher behind them; the "golden-flowing" waters sank lower out of sight. "And now we shall see the city soon," said Davenant to Constance.

She looked up and smiled, and did not answer. The inconclusiveness of all her past experience had never fitted her for a moment like this. She had spent her life in dreaming of happiness until its reality had assumed the aspect of a dream. She followed the others as in a vision; she heard them laughing, talking about her, riding faster and faster down the narrowing mountain-gorge; and the rapid motion, the clattering of hoofs, the rush of the water, seemed sweeping her onward in a sort of trance.

And now they galloped out again into the blinding sunlight; they left the road; before them rose a low, white range of hills, and on the rocky crest a small, white building with a dome. They left the horses; they toiled up the sandy path. Stuart was the first one in the doorway. "Come in," he said. He offered Constance his hand; he watched with a curious interest the sudden light in her eyes, the sudden flush of color on her cheek. For they had stepped out upon a small, rocky plateau where a swarm of yellow butterflies hovered about the stones. Beneath them lay a city and a plain — a wilderness of deep up-springing green — a curving line of warm-tinted houses and glittering mosques and sharply-piercing minarets. And beyond that rose the violet mountains grown silver-pale in the blinding heat; and beyond that the pale border-line of infinite desert space; and all about the city a network of shining

streams, a foam of blossoming trees, circled and crowned the gardens of Damascus.

They sat down in the shade of the building; for awhile they sat there in silence, looking at this wonderful sight. But the more prosaic a nature, the sooner does it grow familiar with rare beauty. Hardly a moment had passed before Mrs. Thayer and Stuart were disputing some detail in the view; in a quarter of an hour they had completely forgotten its existence. Jack was hungry, and Fanny forgot to turn her head as they descended the hill.

And Constance followed them down as in a dream. They mounted their horses again; they rode past miles of blossom-whitened orchards, by winding rivers, through poplar groves and hedges white with may. And tall, white irises rose up beside the full and silent stream; and now they had reached the level of the plain, and passed the first bridge and seen the first house, all gilded and gay with fantastic tracery on its walls, and hidden in deep trees.

"And this is Damascus," said Davenant. But Constance did not answer. She rode on at foot-pace, checking her horse until the hot-mouthed brute curveted and pranced, flecking his breast with foam. And she rode steadily forward, reining him in, erect, silent, looking straight ahead with wide open eyes and a smile of vague triumph on the proud and sensitive mouth.

It was a moment of exquisite delight. The barriers were down, the long anguish of patience at an end. She had risen to the climax of her experience — the culminating hour of youth, in which she held and possessed the world. The barriers were all down, the years of restraint at an end; a surging flood of love — love irresistible, compelling, supreme — had obliterated the last landmark of her past. She rode beneath the flowering branches, and the sunshine crowned her hair with golden touches, and the light wind showered frail, perfumed petals at her feet; and the song of the birds had a meaning, the sky was cloudless, and all the world

was full of gracious promise of fast-coming summer, as she passed through the gates of the earthly paradise to take possession of her life.

Presently they reached the hotel. They rode down the tortuous street called Straight, and dismounted at a small postern-door. It was their first experience of the interior of a Damascene house, and they looked about with some curiosity at the cool and spacious court, the shady divan, the formal rows of orange-trees, the plashing fountain in its marble tank.

And here for a time the party separated. Davenant and Ferris had rooms elsewhere in town.

"I shall see you again this evening. We are all here more or less in the evening," the latter said, as he stopped to shake hands with Constance.

She looked up eagerly, as though about to ask some question. Davenant was watching her.

"I beg your pardon; I did not hear what you said?"

She smiled, and shook her head, and gave him her hand. It was nothing. The two young men walked down the street together for some distance without speaking.

"It is a pity, for there is the unsatisfied soul of a poet in that nature," said Davenant suddenly, with peculiar emphasis; and Ferris halted and stared.

He had thought himself pretty well accustomed to his friend's mental vagaries by this time, but here was a new development — something in his tone, an earnestness of conviction in his manner, which filled him with amused surprise.

"Well, you *are* the rummiest beggar," he said good-humoredly. He turned and scrutinized with keen amusement his companion's dramatic face.

"As a general rule I should not advise you to study the unsatisfied souls of your young lady acquaintances too closely, my boy," he said dryly; "you might find Stuart objecting to the process, you see."

They walked on a few paces.

"Shall we go and find out what's become of that fellow Lawrence?" said George.

Constance had gone up to where the Major was busy settling conditions with the turbaned proprietor of the inn. She slipped her hand under his arm and stood silently by his side.

"Well, Constance?"

"I like that man's embroidered jacket," Miss Varley answered vaguely. She dipped her fingers into the water and then dried them elaborately on her handkerchief. "You are going — are you going to the Consulate, Tom?"

For letters? Well, yes; the Major had thought something of going there.

"Is there any thing I can do for you?" he asked with a smile. He looked curiously at her. "Is there any thing you want to know?"

She turned her face away. This last hour had brought its own experience. She felt weaker, less sure of herself. She felt, as never before, a sudden craving for support and confidence.

"Is there any thing I can do for you?" the Major repeated.

She lifted up her honest eyes. "Yes," she said shyly, her lips growing pale with the effort.

It was then that Fanny came up with some question about the rooms.

"I will see about it," her husband said. He turned to Constance. "You are going to the bazaars, you two? I shall take Hassan. If I hear any news about any one — about — about Aunt Van, for instance, — I will bring it to you with your letters," he said significantly.

"Very well." The girl nodded assent.

"You may expect me in — well, say in a couple of hours," the Major said. He took up his stick. "You are coming, Stuart?"

"Now, don't forget that we are waiting, Tom," expostulated Mrs. Thayer.

Some people coming in at that moment hardly glanced

at the middle-aged man crossing the courtyard, before turning to gaze curiously at the handsome girl he had just left. But in her eyes, at least, that commonplace gray figure was suddenly invested with all the dignity of fate. "In a couple of hours," he had said. Her breath came quicker with suppressed emotion. She put her hand up, uncertainly, to her lips. In a couple of hours. Her secret seemed slipping out of her grasp.

Not long after that they went into the bazaar. They went in with a Damascene courier, a wily Greek, with sleek face and black, uneasy eyes. From time to time Mrs. Thayer was struck with the peculiar fashion in which he seemed analyzing her dress.

"One would think the man had never seen a woman in his life!" she complained petulantly to Constance.

"He seems to me more interested in the cut of your over-dress, dear," said the latter with a laugh.

It was a Saturday afternoon, and the streets were crowded. Men in white, men in scarlet, men in turbans, in fezes, in scanty cotton shirts and flowing robes of silk, passed and repassed in mute and splendid throngs. A dusty, pulverized sunshine filtered softly through the chinks in the boards overhead, piercing the deep, amber-toned shadow with sudden revelations and jewels of light. Now and then the wild, melancholy cry of a camel-driver, following the slow and swaying footsteps of his beasts, jarred on the golden silence with strange suggestion of far-off desert space.

They strolled slowly down the length of the silk bazaar, lingering here and there as their eyes were caught by some pigeon-throated gleam of color, or the wind brought them some new and subtle hint of fragrant gums and the prisoned roses of Ispahan. And now the guide stopped and gazed at Fanny persuasively.

"It is Saturday, madame, if you would see the house of one Jew? Very fine house," he suggested.

Mrs. Thayer was charmed with the idea. They entered another courtyard; it was a larger, more sumptuous interior than any they had seen. An old woman,

carrying a nargileh, was crossing the court before them, her high, inlaid pattens making a clicking sound upon the marble floor. The courier hailed her. They spoke for a moment or two in shrill, emphatic voices.

"She will call the ladies to see you," the man observed with a complacent air.

He led them to a marble divan; there was a Persian rug upon the inlaid pavement; some gold-embroidered cushions; a gaily-painted wall from which the plaster fell in patches. It was now about three o'clock: a still and burning afternoon. The broad fig-leaf shadows lay motionless upon the pavement; the blue of the sky was dulled and dark with heat. They sat down amongst the tumbled, tinselled cushions; presently a door opened on the other side of the court. A group of unveiled women came slowly out into the blazing sunshine; they dropped their pattens at the foot of the divan and crossed languidly over to where Fanny was sitting. They threw themselves down on the cushions and gazed fixedly at their guests.

"It is the sister of the gentleman what keeps this house. You wait; p'raps by-and-by see the wife," the guide informed them in a whisper.

And now another servant appeared, in loose, white dress, bearing a tray of glasses. And then came nargilehs, and then a long pause.

The sunlight flickered on gold-wrought head-dresses, on brown and naked feet, on long, delicate, sinuous forms. Presently a half-grown lad lifted the curtain behind them, a lad with a smooth, yellow face and a wizened look, and dull and restless eyes. He came slowly down the steps and spoke to the interpreter with a certain listless condescension. A shrill series of exclamations followed suddenly upon his entrance; a woman rose from the group and touched Miss Varley on the arm. "You go in other room, see his wife," the guide explained complacently.

There were three women sitting in this inner chamber — three Jewesses, with hard and splendid eyes, with loose

shawls about their waists, and close-fitting caps thick set with pomegranate blossoms and artificial flowers and glittering diamond studs. Some little children were sprawling on the carpet at their feet; the walls were painted with intricate tracery of color; a coarse, cheap lithograph hung high under the vaulted ceiling against some precious Persian tiles. A table, covered with a cloth, stood against the entrance; there was another tray of sweetmeats, a new set of silver-mouthed nargilehs on the floor.

And here, by-the-way, they discovered the true purpose of their visit.

"My lady come from Cairo," the guide began insinuatingly, glancing at Fanny.

"We have been to Cairo," said Mrs. Thayer.

"Cairo very fine place, my lady. The Khedive live in Cairo." He took up the fold of her travelling-dress between his fingers. "You get this in Cairo?" he said.

Mrs. Thayer smiled uneasily; she looked at Constance. "I got it there — yes," she said, with some reluctance.

And now the man hesitated. He looked about him; the woman on the divan followed his movements with intensest interest. "My lady very kind. Very good lady. P'raps you let one these women see how you make your dress?" he suggested feebly.

And Fanny once gone, there was nothing left to occupy Constance. A feverish restlessness of impatience had come upon her. She sat there a moment looking around with blank, unseeing eyes; she got up, she wandered away across the sunny court, and one or two of the women rose and followed her.

She went up the wooden staircase at the farther end; above them was an open terrace, green vine-leaves, and the fierce red of pomegranate blossoms in the sun. She leaned over the balustrade and looked down into the court. A sleepy negress lounged with bare feet in the shadow of the wall. There was not a sound in all the house about her but the cool plashing of the fountain on the stones. She leaned out over the balustrade; a girl

came silently up the winding stair, and paused, and leaned beside her.

Constance turned her head; presently she recognized the face. It was one of the young Jewesses, the mother of the little children they had seen below. The two girls stood looking at each other for a moment in silence — the representatives of two antagonistic civilizations; and gradually the interest faded out of the new comer's face. She turned aside with the facile indifference of a child. She crossed her long arms above her head with superb *nonchalance;* dragged down a flowering branch of vine. The leaves fluttered slowly to the ground through her listless fingers; the long lashes drooped lower on her cheek; her light breathing hardly stirred the flashing diamonds on her breast; she stood motionless, in absolute repose.

And Constance looked at her. I don't know what there was about this woman to remind the girl of Lawrence. She noted with a sudden sinking of heart every detail of that impassioned and unremembering beauty, the perfect oval of her smooth, sun-warmed cheek, the rings of shadow about those delicate temples, the vapid, scarlet mouth, the dark mystery of the beautiful, cruel eyes. These were the women he had been seeing, she thought. She turned away abruptly. She turned away her face, she looked up at the blank blue sky above her, and her own eyes filled with miserable tears. She dashed them indignantly away. The white walls in the sunshine flashed and flickered before her, and she stared down at them, a great sense of impatience, a bitter feeling of impotence rising slowly within her as she looked. She pressed her hand hard against the wooden balustrade until it left a bruise across the soft, white flesh.

The Jewess laughed; a small, green worm had crawled out from between the leaves. She laughed; she broke off a branch from the tree beside her, stripping it slowly of its leaves, her eyes fixed exultingly upon the crawling insect. And now she leaned curiously forward, with a quick movement — a sudden look of hatred and dis-

gust flashing over her face. She struck the thing with the end of her stick; she threw it against the wall, thrusting it back and striking at it again and again — her whole figure instinct and supple with savage and futile delight.

Involuntarily Constance put out her hand.

"Oh, don't, please don't," she said.

It was a scene she remembered long afterward — the blazing sunlight, the cruel, foolish laughter of her companion, the wretched insect crushed beneath their feet. For it was at that moment she heard a voice calling her. "Come down, Constance! The letters are here."

She rose to her feet and went forward a step. "It has come," putting out a hand blindly.

Hassan was waiting for her at the foot of the stairs. She brushed past him; she went up to Fanny: "Well?"

Mrs. Thayer did not answer for a moment. She held an open letter in her hand. There was something which amused her; she laughed, and crushed the thin, blue paper in her fingers.

"Well? Oh, yes; I had forgotten. There is a note from Tom somewhere. We are to meet him. Why, Constance, what's the matter with you? Are you ill?"

"I — oh, it is the sun, I suppose. I have been standing in the sun," incoherently. And then, her face flushing: "You said there was a letter for me to read?"

It was a leaf torn from a note-book, and written in pencil.

"DEAR F. — Tell the guide to take you to Aboo Antika's. Will wait for you there. I send the letters by Hassan. There is a pile of them here waiting for Aunt Van. And, by-the-way, tell Constance they knew nothing about Lawrence at the bank, but I have seen the consul's dragoman. He thinks Lawrence has left for Bagdad."

CHAPTER XVII.

UN ENFANT DU SIÈCLE.

AND about the same time that Miss Varley was reading this letter, Mr. Ferris was standing in front of a closed door, making the quiet street resound with his impatient knocking.

After three or four minutes of this exercise there came a slow and distant shuffling of feet.

"The old idiot!" said Ferris, between his teeth. He knocked again. The steps drew nearer and paused; a hand fumbled about the latch.

"You had better be careful how you introduce dangerous characters into this palace of yours, my friend," the young man remarked with a certain good-natured contempt. He put his hand in his pocket, and took out a small piece of money: "Here, Methuselah!"

The Arab's eyes lightened in their dim sockets; he bowed profoundly; a smile flickered over his austere and covetous face.

But Mr. Ferris did not linger to observe his sensations. He walked on with an assured and familiar step through the hot sunshine between the walls. There was a disused bath-house at the farther end of the courtyard; a fig-tree drooped before its entrance; he put aside the branches and looked in.

There was an artist's easel in the corner, and the artist himself standing before it, whistling in an undertone, and measuring something about his picture with a string. As a shadow fell over his canvas he turned his head. He caught sight of Ferris and put out his hand, with a quick look of pleasure on his face. It was a singularly mobile and sensitive countenance for an

American: hardly effeminate, and yet you were puzzled by its suggestion of a woman's face until you noticed the changeable gray eyes, and realized how much this man must look like his mother.

He was a slightly-built young fellow too, rather under than above the average height, with small, clear-cut features, a very firm and beautiful mouth, a quiet and rather indolent manner. Major Thayer had called him insignificant-looking, once; no woman would have used the epithet.

"Well, George!"

"Ah! they told me I should find you here," said Ferris.

"Been back long?"

"About three hours. I went up to the house for you first. They said you had moved your traps over to the other shop."

Lawrence nodded. "Old Ahmed is only waiting for his brother's camels now to start. I have been expecting to be off any day this last week," taking up his palette and brushes and turning to his work. "I am glad you are back again in time to see me off, old boy. I had almost given you up."

"Oh, Davenant *would* stop;" absently this, and with an air of chagrin. "We have been travelling with some people — Hollo! Why, when did you do that? That is a good bit, by Jove! Deuced good. And how well that figure comes in there. Who is it? not Abdallah?"

"No, the other one; I don't know his name. The little chap who used to clean my brushes for me. I had him in here one day, and — Here 's another thing you haven't seen," taking up a second canvas from the corner.

Mr. Ferris looked at it critically for a moment.

"Yes; I don't know where it is exactly."

"In the Arms Bazaar. I 've been working down there a good deal of late. The only thing finished is the background, of course. The figures are only indicated

you see. I've been making some separate studies for those."

"I see. I don't seem to fancy that sky much, Lawrence. Painty, isn't it, rather? There 's a good bit of work there on that wall."

"You think so? I shan't have time to do much more to it, I 'm afraid," taking up the canvas, and looking at it regretfully.

"Well, I 'm sorry to hear you say that," Ferris answered gravely.

There was a moment's silence; then the older man glanced up from his work.

"Will you smoke?"

"I 've got some here," taking out his own cigar-case.

"Yes; I 'm sorry to hear you are going, Lawrence. It 's a mistake — a foolish business all round. I wish," said Ferris suddenly, "I wish you would give it up, old fellow. I wish to heaven old Ahmed would refuse to take you!"

Lawrence laughed. "Wait till you see the picture I bring back. There is not another face in the East like it — not one. It is a type apart. And then the romance of the thing, my boy; the shadowless mystery of it all; the long desert journey; the illimitable desert skies; the silence of waste places —"

"Et cetera. I should expect to hear that sort of stuff from Davenant," said Ferris.

His companion laughed again good-naturedly. "Well, he isn't wrong half the time, the little beggar. Beauty *is* a form of goodness, I daresay. At all events, it 's the form best suited to my comprehension. And you forget the picture I mean to paint —"

"Provided that old fool Ahmed will let you paint her, which I, for one, don't believe. I sincerely hope he won't. Why, the whole thing is an absurdity on the face of it! A six-weeks' journey with a mob of half civilized savages across a desert, on the chance of painting a girl you have only seen once, and that by acci-

dent. Why, if you did see her you could not even speak!"

"And I'm not so sure that is not the best part of it all," said Lawrence lightly. "That and the getting to Ispahan. I've been studying Persian while you were away, Ferris. Old Ahmed is a capital master. On the whole, I am not so sure I shall not propose to marry into the family, and turn camel-driver myself. But the choice is between the Desert and Constantinople. I leave this in any case," turning to his work with a gesture which dismissed the subject.

A silence, with nothing to break it but the slow dripping of the fountain and the rustling of the fig-leaves out there in the sun. Mr. Ferris strolled over to the window, and began turning over some prints.

"By-the-way, I hope you knew I had that portfolio of yours safely with me?" he said: "the one with the Esdraelon cartoons. I only found it out at Jerusalem. I suppose I packed it up by mistake."

"Oh, that's all right," said Lawrence carelessly.

He went on with his painting. Before long he got up, walked back a few steps, and looked intently at his work, and then a satisfied look came into his face. In a moment he began singing softly to himself: —

> Si je vous le disais pourtant, que je vous aime,
> Qui sait, brune aux yeux bleus, ce que vous en diriez?
> L'amour, le vous savez —

"You're a little in my light, old fellow."

> L'amour, vous le savez, cause une peine extrême.

"But I say," breaking off his song abruptly, "you haven't told me any thing about your trip?"

Mr. Ferris looked up from the etchings. "I have not done much. A few sketches — they are up at the house with my traps — but nothing of consequence. I was disappointed in the country, rather."

"Well, I don't know," said Lawrence; "there are fine things there about Esdraelon. And how did Davenant like it? You said you had some people with you —"

"By Jove! I had forgotten all about them," the young man said. "And they are friends of yours, too. A Major Thayer and his wife, and —"

"Major Thayer! What, not old Tom Thayer, surely? Well, that is a joke; and what the devil is he doing here, I should like to know?"

Well, Major Thayer was travelling, Mr. Ferris supposed. Travelling, like anybody else. His wife was with him too, and a good-looking man by the name of Stuart.

Lawrence nodded. "I know. Jack Stuart, his cousin. I 've seen him once or twice."

"And then," said Ferris, turning suddenly and looking his friend hard in the face, "and then Miss Varley is with them, too."

Mr. Lawrence looked up for a moment with a puzzled air. "Miss Varley?" he said reflectively. His face lightened. "Constance Varley! Ah, that is good news, indeed," with cordial pleasure. "A nice girl that, Ferris; and honest and fearless as the day. I saw a great deal of her three or four years ago, before I left home. We were great friends that winter, I remember. And so she is here?" taking up his brushes again, and touching his picture softly with a pleased smile. "I must go and look them up. I shall be glad to see her. I don't think she will have forgotten me."

Mr. Ferris leaned farther back in his chair. "Miss Varley is not, I should imagine, a person to forget old friends. But if you are so much interested in her," with another keen glance of inquiry, "if you are interested, you may care to hear that she is going to be married to Mr. Stuart shortly."

Lawrence started; he looked up incredulously. "To Stuart! Why, I had heard — To Stuart! Constance Varley going to marry that fellow! Why, it 's impossible, Ferris. But are you sure?"

"She has never told me of it herself," knocking the ash from his cigar deliberately. "Of course not. I have only known her four or five days; and I hardly think it is an official engagement — yet."

"But that girl marry Jack Stuart!"

"Well — the friends expect it. Mrs. Thayer told Claude. And Stuart seems a good enough sort of fellow in his way."

"I should not have thought it would have been Miss Varley's way, that 's all," said Lawrence dryly. "Poor little Constance! Well, it 's the kind of match that must be made in heaven, I suppose. At least I know no one on earth who would care to accept the responsibility of such a waste of good material."

Ferris smiled. "How about Mrs. Thayer?"

"Oh — Mrs. Thayer! That 's another suitable marriage for you, if you like. The fact is, marriage —?"

He stopped, threw down his brushes impatiently, and faced round on his chair.

"Give me one of your cigars; we will talk of something else. I haven't seen anybody to speak to for a fortnight! I am beginning to forget the sound of my own voice."

The conversation became technical. They criticised some pictures. Ferris had been making some experiments with a new kind of quick-drying oil.

"You could not have a better vehicle for hasty sketches. You ought to try it, Lawrence," he said.

"Try it? Try what?" Mr. Lawrence started, and begged his pardon.

"The fact is, I was thinking of something miles away. I have been living the life of a hermit so long I listen to gossip like a woman," with an indulgent smile at his own weakness. "Now, this marriage of Miss Varley's. But you don't know the girl as I do; you wouldn't understand. Why, that girl had all the craving for beauty, for expression, for utterance — She had the temperament of an artist once," with a puzzled look.

Ferris looked up slowly. "No; I can't understand. My own experience with women —" He got up hastily and walked across to the window. "God knows, it *is* hard sometimes to understand what a woman wants," with a short laugh, a dark flush creeping over his boyish face.

The other man glanced at him quickly, and then looked steadily away. He had heard something of Ferris's past history. "Poor old boy! he 's thinking of that girl he was engaged to at Venice," he thought.

"I wish you had been here last night," he said aloud. "There was a Mahomedan festa of some kind in the great mosque. The bazaar was illuminated ; there was a procession of dervishes with torches. I don't know what saint's day they were celebrating, but the consul sent all the strangers word it was safer not to show one's pale Christian face abroad."

"You were there, of course."

"Well — I find something rather amusing in being persecuted for my religious convictions. I enjoy the injustice of it" (with a laugh) ; "for, personally speaking, I confess I am still seeking for that Christian religion of which I hear so much, and which I find neither in superb cathedrals erected in honor of a dogma, nor in discourses adapted to the habits of a fashionable congregation, nor even in religious picture-frames and 'sincere' effects of painted glass, like our friend Davenant. The Catholics stultify and the Evangelicals starve me, and I am too fastidious — well, too selfish, too snobbish, if you like the word better — to turn Communist. A paganism, tempered by epigrams, is, I believe, my present condition. When I discover the means of reconciling the irreconcilable — of serving God and Mammon with a breath — I shall join some well-established Church. But until then" (carelessly) "I am an experimentalist — I worship at the altar of the unknown god."

"Well," said Ferris, "I don't know. You would call it the result of inherent Philistinism, I suppose, but I must say I find heaven and earth about as much as I can manage, even in their present organized condition. To be sure I should not like to have to admit that to Davenant."

"Davenant!" Lawrence laughed. "I want to see Davenant. I am curious to know how Jerusalem has

affected him. When he went away from here, his religious formula reminded me rather of one of those statues of the old gods you see occasionally in an Italian church. It was a Venus re-baptized into a Virgin, and the halo was newer than the smile. Have another cigar?"

"Thanks. Claude is a good sort of fellow, you know, in spite of all his nonsense. He strikes me as a sort of epitomized Europe. Now at home — But I am curious to see if he will accomplish any thing. He has talent."

"Too cultivated by half," said Lawrence sententiously. "I tell you what it is, old boy — this modern mania for cultivating oneself is nothing more nor less than suicidal. Why, take the modern artist; look at modern art. It is interesting, if you like; but what more? Interesting and impotent. And it must be so, by Jove! it must," sitting up and speaking with sudden energy, "for culture is necessarily self-conscious. Its final aim is refinement, not strength; beauty, not exhilaration; the thirst for perfection — and with perfection melancholy."

Ferris was leaning back, his hands clasped behind his head, staring placidly at the ceiling.

"How about the Greeks?" he said, looking up with an amused air.

It was a long time since he had seen Lawrence in one of these moods.

"The Greeks? You don't imagine that the Greeks were cultivated in our sense of the word? Culture began with the Renaissance, my dear fellow — when life became complex, when morality interfered, and a man ceased to lose sight of himself in his art. Culture, I tell you, is self-conscious, but genius is personal; and modern public opinion has suppressed personality, and democracy has outlawed it. And because there is a small set of we artists who see this, it has become the fashion to try to be original — to *try* to be original, by Jove! and men spend years endeavoring to be spontaneous. Why, look at that thing," pointing to the

picture on his easel; "look at that thing if you want to know what I mean. Clever? of course it 's clever — damnably so. And when you think I meant to paint pictures once — Ah, well! *On nâit demi-dieu et l'on meurt épicier;* and that 's about the end of it," taking up his brushes again with a sigh.

He went on working in silence for several minutes, and again the fountain dripped audibly through the stillness, and the thin, cold light crept farther down the wall. And presently Ferris rose; he stretched his arms, he looked about him. "I must be going. I promised to meet Major Thayer. Are you coming too?" he asked.

Lawrence took out his watch and looked at it.

"I told the boy to come for my traps at five, and I expect Ahmed at the café. But give my compliments to the ladies. I will call on them at the hotel. And, I say, Ferris —"

"Well?"

"Don't say any thing to them about my going; there 's a good fellow. I can't have people canvassing my affairs, to begin with; and then, the fact is, your coming home has demoralized me. I had forgotten that man is a social animal while you were away. Upon my word, I begin to think something of leaving off work and going to Constantinople instead. It 's a plan that was suggested to me some time ago. I've got some business there. That was one of the advantages of Ispahan," with a peculiar expression; "it is some distance from Constantinople."

"Well, provided you don't start on that fool's errand to Bagdad —"

"Urgent, in season and out of season, old fellow, eh? It is a foolish plan, I daresay; but I should have thought you would have appreciated it," smiling. "It was a painter's whim, the dream of *Un homme errant qui aime passionément le bleu.*"

"*Un homme errant?* an erring man, I should translate that," said Ferris, with a careless laugh.

And presently he went away. He went out into the open courtyard, out into the blazing sunshine, his steps echoing quickly across the sun-scorched stones; and now a door slammed to behind him.

It was curious to watch the change which came over Lawrence. His whole expression altered suddenly, as only a sensitive face can alter. He worked on doggedly for a minute or two; he got up irresolutely; he took a turn about the room. A large portfolio of drawings was lying open on the chair where Ferris had left it. He glanced at it once or twice, and closed it sharply, with a muttered exclamation of disgust.

"By Jove, old George is right! It *is* a fool's errand. It is late, too, for me to begin," with a curious, restrained contempt.

He took a piece of paper from his pocket: part of a letter written in French and in a woman's hand. He stood looking at it quietly for a moment, his face growing troubled, his lips set and stern. The paper was folded in such a fashion there was one sentence he could not help but read. It began abruptly:—

—"June, in Constantinople? But some time I know that you will come back to me. It may be now: it may be long years hence, when all the beautiful youth has passed out of our lives, and you will look back to the days we were together, and your heart will go near to breaking to know that they can never come again. And it will have been your own fault, Denis. You have sworn never to see me again, and I know it, and I am waiting for you. I am waiting to be forgiven. *J'attends.*"

He crushed the paper hard between his fingers. He drew a long, deep breath; his face had altogether lost its color.

"*Grand Dieu! qu'elle était belle!*" the young man said.

The broken fountain trickled slowly through the still-

ness, drop by drop, dripping down upon the marble floor. It was a silent afternoon; only, now and then, the fig-trees rustled outside there in the sunlight; a breath of warmer air stole through the doorway into the bare white-washed room. The cold, thin light crept in at the high window; the colorless stillness seemed to fall like a charm between him and the outer world. He paced up and down for a long time, thinking; turning sharply at the corners, with knitted brows and a slow and resolute step. One of these turns brought him near the dripping fountain. He stopped and watched it with a curious smile. The slow drops fell one by one into the brimming basin in shining circles that rippled and passed away. And the years of his life, as they too passed in mute succession before him, seemed hardly less purposeless, less fatally purposeless, than these.

CHAPTER XVIII.

WHICH CONTAINS SOME ACCOUNT OF THE LAWRENCE FAMILY.

MISS Marie De Bray had only been home three months from her French convent. Her letters to her five most intimate friends — they wrote to each other regularly twice a week, and it was an understood thing that they were *never* to forget one another — her letters to her late companions, then, were still full of delight and wonderment over her own dear home, and her dear father, and her dear brothers, and the dear old plantation life. This young lady, in a word, was in the happiest, the most impressionable, the most sentimental frame of mind imaginable — when she met her cousin, Henry Lawrence.

It was on the occasion of that young gentleman's first

visit to the South. He had been spending the winter in the neighboring town of Richmond, and having awoke one fine morning with a racking headache, and a very indistinct recollection of its cause, it had occurred to him to have his horse saddled, and, like a dutiful nephew, to ride over and pay his respects to his old uncle and aunt.

What he thought upon meeting his cousin Marie has never transpired. But it was not long before people began to remark upon the fact that Mr. Lawrence's daily rides had assumed one invariable direction. His face had become familiar to every field-hand on the De Bray plantation. There was a standing quarrel among the younger negroes as to who should hold Mars' Henry's horse. Indeed, so confirmed a habit had these visits become, that when one fine day he changed his hours and rode over early in the morning, he found the stable-yard deserted by all but the smallest and blackest of the grooms. It was a great opportunity for Zip.

"Mars' Edouard out shootin,' suh," he said astutely. "Miss Marie gone down in the garden for flowers. Specs Miss Marie all alone dah, suh. Tank you, suh," catching the bit of silver with a grin.

Miss Marie *was* in the garden, and alone. She was picking winter roses when her cousin found her. It may be she had expected his coming, for she never looked up at his approach, bending her face down over her basket with cheeks that put to shame the paler winter flowers.

She had run a thorn into her hand; she showed him the scratch presently, looking up in his face the while with innocent, brown eyes. It was the prettiest, the dearest little hand in the world, the young man declared, holding the trembling little fingers in his own, and —

"Nonsense, Harry!" the young girl says, turning away with a blush, and then — Well then, Mr. De Bray, senior, who was also taking his morning stroll about the shrubbery, had the opportunity of witnessing a very pretty scene.

"Your mother wants you. I think you had better go in for a moment to your mother, Marie," he observed some moments later, and in precisely the same tone of unvarying courtesy his daughter had always heard him use. And then, when Marie had crept away, "Well, sir!" the planter said, grimly, turning to his nephew.

Young Lawrence was indisputably a Yankee. His home was in New England. He was known to have been somewhat wild at college. He was also known to have inherited a hundred thousand dollars at his father's death. And for three years back the De Bray cotton crop had hardly paid the cost of its transport to the north.

"Well, sir!" the planter said.

It was the finest wedding the De Bray family had seen for years. It was like old times, the oldest negroes told each other. And from little Zip in the stable-yard to the bevy of bridesmaids, come all the way from the Charleston convent to grace the great event, through all the gamut of black and white and yellow, there was not a voice but had some word of praise for Henry Lawrence. The truth is he was a very fascinating young fellow. When he took his bride to Saratoga Springs, Mr. Lawrence was almost more of a social success than his beautiful young wife. For one thing, he cared more about this sort of pleasure than she did. The gentle, convent-bred girl was more repelled than charmed by this first experience of the world. Her Southern education had never prepared her for a life where only the women were at leisure. She could not understand that gentlemen should be in business. These dashing, energetic women frightened her. In a word, she was very shy, very proud, very ignorant, very much in love with her husband, perhaps a little jealous. And perhaps she had some reason for this latter feeling. Perhaps she was not so far wrong when she begged her husband to take her to their new home.

And this in spite of frequent warnings. "Graveport

is a pretty old place, Marie. I 've lived there all my life, and of course I know every man, woman, and child in the village. But it 's different for you ; you won't find a soul to speak to there, remember. But a woman never knows when she 's well off," her husband said.

Mrs. Lawrence listened with perfect incredulity. She was in no way apprehensive about her future neighbors. For had not Judge Poynter, the Member of Congress, the one great man of Graveport, called upon her here already? And had she not spoken to that nice young Mr. Carter, who had been so pleased to see his old friend Lawrence the day they met him in New York ; who had told her so much about the Graveport woods and beaches, and had even offered, with a blush, to send her a copy of his little book of poems — "Translations from the German, and Other Verses" — whose forthcoming publication was the cause of his presence in the city, and thus, in a remote way, if she would allow him to say so, had procured him the honor and pleasure of knowing Mrs. Lawrence?

Mrs. Lawrence accepted his compliments with perfect gravity and respect. She could not in the least understand why her husband should burst out laughing in the midst of them. This Mr. Carter was the first living author she had ever seen. She contemplated him with simple admiration. She was pleased to think that her Harry should be on familiar terms with such a literary star. And, like every thing else, it tended to show what a remarkable man her Harry was.

But it was not until the early autumn that Mr. Lawrence took her home. A cool, salt wind was blowing in from the sea as they got out at the small country station of Graveport. The yellowing elms rustled their branches in welcome against a sky of deep and cloudless blue. The pale, golden leaves fluttered down — the droppings of some unseen bridal torch — about the young wife's path.

They had been at home a week when Lawrence came in one morning and invited her to accompany him upon

a drive. "I 'm going down to the village," the young man observed carelessly. "There 's nothing much else to do in this confounded, dreary old hole. If we see Bill Carter I 'll ask him to dinner, Marie. We 're sure enough to find him too," with a laugh he did not trouble himself to explain.

Graveport is a typical New England village, an old seaport town grown too small for its shell — a town with large, grass-grown wharves, where the tides come in unheeded, and the little boys fish for flounders, and a few old fishermen sit and gossip in the sun; a town very proud of its elms, with wide and ill-kept roads, and staring white houses with inviolable gates and blinds. And, as the life of a New England home centres about the kitchen-door, so, in this village, it was only about the post-office and the market that a feeble show of activity made itself felt. The linen-drapers displayed their goods more boldly to the public; Miss Richardson's bonnet-shop was gay with autumn fashions. There was a rival flourish of blue and crimson in the colored globes at the chemist's window next door.

It was in front of this very apothecary's that Mr. Lawrence checked his horses.

"I thought you were going to call on Mr. Carter, Henry dear?"

"Oh, you come along with me," said dear Henry with a grin.

The little shop was empty when they entered it, but the drug-room door was left ajar, and a potent smell of camphor, the subdued sound of pestle and mortar, gave evidence its proprietor was within. "Hollo, Carter, are you busy? Can you come out and see my wife?" said Mr. Lawrence.

Well, the apothecary came. He had on a gray alpaca coat, the sleeves of which were neatly turned back over his cuffs, and a large white apron was fastened about his waist; but this latter he hastily removed before shaking hands with his visitors across the counter. He welcomed them to Graveport. He quoted Tennyson.

He took some flowers from a glass, and, wrapping their stems carefully in a piece of white paper with "Carter, Apothecary," stamped in colored letters across it, he presented the whole with a neat little bow and speech to his old schoolmate's lady. "I don't need to ask you if you want any thing in our line this morning, Harry," he said; but he insisted upon mixing some sal volatile for Mrs. Lawrence, who indeed was sitting there speechless and pale with mingled surprise and mortification.

"You 've been furbishing up the shop, old boy, since I was here," remarked that lady's husband, seating himself comfortably upon the counter, and looking about him with a knowing air. "Hollo, French soap? Why, Graveport 's looking up in the fashionable world, Carter. And when are you coming to dine with us, by-the-way? Mrs. Lawrence has been dying to hear the last news about your book."

Mr. Carter grew pink with pleasure. He stammered something about appreciative souls; he produced the promised volume from his desk. It was handsomely bound in blue and gold; it was perfumed with the best sachet powder; there was a dedicatory inscription upon the title-page; and a little girl coming in at that moment with a request for a box of rhubarb pills, "which father says the last wasn't made strong enough, Mr. Carter," the poet absolutely kept his customer waiting while he finished reading aloud a sonnet about the inner life.

And then on their way home, and for the first time, Mr. Lawrence found fault with his wife. "For the sooner you get rid of all these d——d Southern notions, why the better it will be for all of us," he remarked with perfect frankness. "Bill Carter not a gentleman? Well, he don't keep a crowd of lazy niggers to do his work for him, if that 's what you mean. A man 's a man in New England," said Mr. Lawrence, "and a gentleman afterwards. But you needn't have Carter at the house if you don't like. Hurt his feelings? Nonsense! you 're always bothering about people's feelings. I wish

you had considered mine a little more before you insisted upon coming here; but that 's just like a woman — never knows when she 's well off. But it 's precious badly off you 'll find yourself, *I* can tell you, if you don't learn that Graveport is not in Virginia, my dear."

The golden leaves were still falling along her pathway as Mrs. Lawrence entered her home that day The young wife stooped and picked a handful from the grass and looked at them wistfully. It may be she was remembering at that moment that here, too, was the sign of ended summer — and only the dead leaves between her and the drifting snow.

And so, from the very beginning, there was but little question of Mrs. Lawrence's unpopularity with the good people of Graveport. Some few infatuated young men, like Mr. William Carter, for instance, might put in a plea on account of her beauty. It was easy to say that she was good; that she was equally gentle and gracious to every one about her; that she was devoted to her husband, generous even to excess to the poor: the fact remained the same — she was not one of them. Before three months had passed there was hardly an old woman in the village who had not her own particular anecdote to tell about the new French madame; how Mrs. Dodge had found her breakfasting at ten o'clock in the morning; how Mason the grocer had had to send to Boston for all the butter they ate; and, for all the airs she gave herself, how people had seen her laughing and gossiping by the hour with that negro maid! And I am afraid that it must be admitted that Marie herself did little or nothing to check the tide of all this popular wrath. The truth is she refused their invitations; she would not go to their tea-drinkings, after the first; she laughed at the Lyceum lectures. "I am afraid there has been some mistake. I can assure you I have never thought of being a governess," she said, with her most superb air to Miss Lucy Carter, when that young lady called upon her to suggest a class in French. "As mother thought you might not have much to do with your time,

Mrs. Lawrence, since Henry is away so much from home," Miss Carter had added with a toss of her head. Miss Carter had been the belle of Graveport in her day, and it may be this allusion to her husband was not especially satisfactory to Mrs. Lawrence.

Perhaps, all things considered, it was hardly to be wondered at that, long before the pale New England spring, the Lawrences had drifted back to the city. It was the last that Graveport saw of them for many and many a day. It is true that from time to time vague rumors would reach there of the fugitives: one year it was Mr. Carter who met them in New York, whither he had taken his wife upon a bridal tour; again it was old Miss Richardson, going up to Boston for her yearly collection of new fashions, who had chanced upon Marie face to face, "and looking not a day older, my dear, and her with all those little children;" and yet again the reports were of another character, and people shook their heads with melancholy satisfaction over the tales of young Lawrence's wild doings. "Poor Henry! he was always weak. But then, what could you expect with such a wife?" as Miss Carter pertinently inquired. And then came the rumor that they had gone to Europe. And then, quite suddenly, the news that Mr. Lawrence was dead.

And almost before the excitement caused by this report had died away, one fine October morning a carriage stopped before the Lawrences' door. The unused gate creaked heavily as it turned upon its hinges; the lawn was strewn with withered leaves from the old elms overhead. As Miss Richardson hurried to her parlor window, she could see a black-clad figure pass through the brilliant sunshine among the dying leaves. The children were delighted with this rustling carpet; they crowded about her; they pulled at her dress; "but she didn't seem to take no notice nor nothing," Miss Richardson commented. And Graveport knew the widow had come home.

Little Denis was a pretty boy of eight or nine, his

sisters — "the children," as the boy called them contemptuously — were still in the nursery, under old black Jenny's rule, at the time of this event; and it was perhaps but natural that, as the years went on, and they grew older, a thousand new ties and associations should spring up between them and the people of the village — ties and associations their mother could never understand. Indeed, to her dying day, this lady remained a stranger to the place. And, for that matter, her whole life was centred in her children: when she addressed her neighbors on any other subject it was with the air of a dethroned princess addressing her inferiors. Since her husband's death she had become more French than ever. She surrounded herself with negro servants. At an age and in a community where a woman of thirty is a faded, shattered, indomitable machine, she dressed herself in delicate and flowing robes of white, and knots of blue, and ruffles of lace about her beautiful, helpless hands. In a land of sectarian prejudice, she was seen by credible witnesses drinking coffee on her lawn at four o'clock on a Sunday afternoon, in company with several strangers, and one of these a Roman Catholic priest. "Settin' about a table on the grass like a lot o' Crazy Janes without house nor home, and her a widder woman, on the Sabbath! It's what I call a flyin' in the face of Providence," said Deacon Davis grimly.

But perhaps the two worst counts against the innocent sinner were, first, her attendance at the Catholic church, — a small, stucco chapel erected for the convenience of the Irish mill-hands, where Mrs. Lawrence sat every Sunday morning, looking serenely beautiful and unconscious of her surroundings; and then the fact that — she rode. For in that land of invalid women and knock-kneed horses (harnessed on Sunday afternoons when the family "carry-all" was needed to take the family to church), it was Mrs. Lawrence's practice to ride; and the fishermen by the shore, the few woodcutters amongst the pines, had long since grown accustomed to the sound of muffled hoof-beats. The children had learned to watch for their

coming, crowding to the window to see the gentle, sad-faced lady canter by, and wonder at her boy.

"I met 'em again this aternoon. The Jedge was with 'em," Mr. Jones would remark at dinner — Mr. Jones, a scrupulously accurate man, who had been known to add a date-stone to a pound of dates rather than give a customer short measure. "I met 'em — trapesing about, as usual. The French madame had her lap full o' weeds, and the boy was a sticking a lot o' them purple asters in her hat. They seed me a-comin', and the madame, she asked ater you, Mariar," with a side-glance at the sickly woman bending above the stove.

"Where was it, father?" asks the eldest girl.

"By them Folly Woods; near the crossroad. She was askin' her way to — "

"I know the place. Do tell! So she was there, was she? I used to go there to pull May-blooms when I was a girl. I hain't seen those woods these fifteen years or more," says Mariar, turning around to hush the crying baby in its chair. "Mary Jones, if you don't let that little brother o' yours alone — ! and George, keep your fingers out o' that molasses, sir. You had a genteel sufficiency an hour ago. What was she goin' after, father? Did she say?"

"After more weeds, I reckon. The way that woman litters up that house o' hern do beat the Dutch. Kiting across the country like a white pine-dog with a popple tail; and the Jedge with 'em too — a man o' his sense, and a professor of religion! I 'd admire to know what that boy of hers can come to, seein' such goin's on," said Mr. Jones.

And Mr. Jones's was not the only speculation on this topic. For it was about this time, I think, that a certain interview took place.

Mrs. Lawrence had stayed at home that day. It was a still, warm, beautiful September afternoon. She was pacing up and down the garden-walk; the train of her white dress brushed against a glowing border of brilliant autumn flowers; the yellowing leaves were floating down

in the same old fashion from the frost-touched elms; the mild autumnal sunshine resting upon her flushed and pensive face — a fair and gracious and singularly youthful face it seemed in the eyes of the man who saw it.

"For you know, dear Mrs. Lawrence, it is impossible," Judge Poynter was saying, in a voice which I doubt if any one but this woman beside him would ever have recognized as his; "quite impossible. Your boy will grow up — how old is he now? fifteen? sixteen? — in five years' time he will be a young man, with a life apart from yours, and you a young woman still."

"I was six-and-thirty on my last birth-day," said Mrs. Lawrence.

"A young woman still; a charming woman always. And to think of your throwing yourself away upon these people here! It is a shame, Mary — a waste, a criminal waste of faculties that were given you to be an ornament — yes, and an honor — to any society you deigned to enter, by Jove!" with a sudden relapse into the Edward Poynter of twenty years ago. "And as for this boy, he's a fine little fellow, and a brave little fellow, and we'll make an honest gentleman of him — a man you will be proud of, Mary. For the boy's own sake I think you should say 'Yes,' my dear," said the Judge.

I think she came very near saying it. She looked up at the handsome, stalwart, gray-haired man beside her. I think that she realized that here was a name and a position any woman might be proud to accept; and I think that for a moment she wavered. I am sure that after he had left her — after she had watched him turn away sorrowful, incredulous, protesting — I am sure, I say, that she looked up at the serene beauty of the sky above her, that she looked around at the blazing garden-borders with quite a new sense of narrowness and loss. Perhaps it was only the natural regret of having wounded a friend; perhaps some old thirst for a wider life, some forgotten but living capacity for enjoyment, for the pleasant excitement of admiration — the gracious privilege

of giving pleasure — had been awakened by his words. There was an unusual flush on the widow's delicate cheek, an almost girlish embarrassment in her manner as she went forward to greet her son returning home from school.

"I 'm late and I know it, and I couldn't help it," that young gentleman remarked cheerfully, vaulting over the garden-gate with a dexterous toss of his books at the grinning Jenny's head; "I stayed to see Ned Mason's boat, and she is a beauty! Ned 's going to sea before long, mother. He can't stand it at home since Mrs. Mason 's married again. Some people think it 's queer of Ned to take it in that fashion; but *I* don't wonder at it, you know," said Master Denis, sagely. And to his dying day Denis Lawrence never guessed why his mother threw her arms about his neck and kissed him at that particular moment.

It was about this same time young Lawrence made up his mind to become a painter. Of course the lad had always had a taste for drawing. There was portfolio after portfolio full of sketches with "Denis Lawrence, fecit," in the corner, carefully stored away among his mother's treasures. But when he was about nineteen, it so happened the boy spent a winter in New York. It was there that for the first time he saw the interior of an artist's studio; it was there he abandoned all idea of college; and it was then and there he decided to study abroad.

At first Mrs. Lawrence would not hear of his going to Europe. The very thought of his departure distracted her with grief. She implored him not to leave her. She wrote letter after letter to her brother at home, entreating him, adjuring him, by his responsibility as a guardian, not to sanction her boy's departure. And in the midst of all this agitation, and quite unexpectedly, Mr. Edouard De Bray came north.

He arrived at Graveport one wintry evening, wrapped up to his eyes in fur pelisses, and swearing violently and indiscriminately at the Yankees and their climate; and

before twenty-four hours were over, and to the lad's intense surprise, the plans were entirely settled for Denis's sojourn in Paris.

His surprise might have been lessened perhaps, had he known then what he only heard years afterwards — the purport of an interview which took place between his mother and his guardian the very night of the latter's arrival.

"*Ma sœur*, I have something to tell you," said Mr. De Bray. He went to the door and locked it noiselessly. "Are your children, are your servants, all in bed?" he asked. He took the widow by the hand, he led her gravely to the fire, and, stooping down before it, he whispered in her ear.

She started back with a low cry of terror.

"Hush! some one may hear you," the Virginian said again, and with the same strange solemnity of manner.

The short, gray-haired man standing before that fire, biting his nails and staring at the logs, had some of the authority of a martyr about him at that moment.

"It may take — all," he said slowly, stretching out his hand. "Virginia will need all, my sister," with uplifted head, and the passion of a lifetime flashing suddenly into the heavy face.

They settled about the boy's departure: he was to remain away a year.

"And you 'll remember, my boy, you have given me your word — your word of honor as a De Bray — that you won't come home before that year expires," his uncle reminded him with peculiar significance.

The lad looked up curiously from his imperturbable guardian to his mother's wan and tear-stained face.

"All right, sir! Not unless my mother sends for me," he said stoutly.

There was only a week before his vessel sailed, and yet, in the midst of all his wild excitement, the boy found time to wonder whatever that promise might mean.

He found out soon enough. He had not been three months in Paris when the catastrophe came. The flag

was fired on at Fort Sumter, and for awhile the lad was half mad with rage and revolt.

"Our cousins, the other De Brays, have come back from the country. My cousin, the Vicomte, has married a wife young enough to be his daughter. She is one of the most beautiful women in Paris," he wrote to his mother on one occasion. "They want me to paint her portrait; they ask me continually to go and see them; and have you not made it impossible? Shall I go to her house and let her think me a coward? Or would you have me tell her how my own mother has cheated me like a child?"

It was the first serious breach between the mother and her son, and for a time it was difficult to say which suffered from it the most.

"You tell me I am a De Bray. I answer you I am an Americ̣an," the young man wrote at last, in answer to one of the widow's piteous letters. "And you would have me stay here like a miserable sham, you would have me skulk like a girl out of reach of danger, when there isn't blood enough left in America to wipe out the insult to our flag. My uncle may fight where he chooses; my place is at the North. I am coming to take it. I am coming home, mother. Three months from to-day the year I promised you is ended. I shall stay here three months from to-day."

He stayed three years. At last, one bleak December night, deep in the frozen heart of the New England winter, and when all the elms stood white and rigid beneath a three-days' fall of snow, at last Denis Lawrence came home. He came home a man, and it was with an indescribable pang of jealous sorrow the widow realized the fact; her boy was a boy no more.

She went in to see him that first night, creeping stealthily to the door of his room when all the house

was hushed and silent. It was long after midnight, but a light was burning on his table as she entered, and Denis was seated before it, his face haggard and wan, and buried in his hands.

He started and looked up at the sound of her gentle entrance. "Is that you, mother?" he said wildly. He clutched a portrait, some papers lying before him, and thrust them hastily aside.

"Why don't you go to sleep, my darling?" the mother asked, in the old, tender, well-remembered voice. She laid her hand upon her boy's forehead and smoothed back his tumbled hair. "Why don't you go to sleep, my boy?" she said trembling.

And Denis took his mother's hand in his and kissed it. There was but little need of explanation between those two.

The days went on and on. In spite of his mother's guest, Miss Poynter, it was but a dull house now, this home to which young Lawrence had returned; a poverty-stricken house, the young man thought with bitter mortification, remembering the life he had led in the years he had been away.

He chafed with inexpressible impatience at the thought of his own helplessness. There was no more talk of his going to the war now; indeed, in those first days, the widow would hardly bear him out of her sight; and Denis saw with alarm the change those few years had made in her appearance. He spoke of it repeatedly to Miss Poynter; and there was but little to comfort him in the young girl's report.

"She is a good girl," the widow said, speaking of Charlotte in one of her many conversations with her son, "a good girl; she has been a kind little companion to me this summer. I missed your sisters sadly when they went away, Denis."

"My sisters had no right to leave you," the young man said.

"It is a dull house, my dear," said the widow, with her melancholy smile; "and Mrs. Poynter was very

kind in inviting them; and the poor children needed society. They were glad to go. And yet I have done what I could for my children," said Mrs. Lawrence.

Another time she told him about the money that had been lost. "As for all the De Bray fortune, it has gone — it has gone for a good cause," she said, her cheeks flushing painfully.

And then, presently, as Charlotte Poynter got up and left the room, "She is a good girl," the widow repeated, looking after her affectionately. "She will be very wealthy, Denis," she added timidly, after a moment, "she will be wealthy, Denis; and you — oh, my darling, if you knew how I have thought of you!"

"It was impossible," the young man said impatiently, "impossible." The very suggestion was irksome to him. "I have done with — Miss Poynter's fortune is nothing to me," he said. He frowned as he turned away.

It was a dull winter certainly. The weeks seemed to stretch out to twice their normal length; the weary battle months rolled by with hardly a break in all their blood-stained monotony. It seemed to Denis sometimes that they were buried alive; he chafed against his captivity in bitter silence, carrying the newspapers to his own room and devouring their contents with eager, humiliated eyes. He paid very little attention to the women of his household on those days, and perhaps it was only natural that they should redouble in their efforts to please him. It was no easy matter at times, but little Charlotte persevered bravely. They had talked of Lawrence's coming for months before his arrival, and I have small doubt but the mother had made a hero of her boy.

One afternoon he was sitting with Miss Poynter in the studio. For some weeks past he had been engaged in making a study for a picture, a little bit of *genre* — a girl's head, an open window, and, beyond, a stretch of wintry sky. As chance would have it, he was that day in a particularly happy mood. Miss Poynter was an

excellent sitter. He was trying a new process of his own, and the picture promised to be a success.

"I think, by Jove! I think I've got it this time, and no mistake," he said, with quite a new satisfaction in his voice. He looked over to Charlotte for sympathy.

Miss Poynter was sitting by the window, crying.

She had had a letter from her cousin Edward that morning. "He is coming — he is coming to take me away," the girl ended with a sob.

If Denis hesitated, it was only for a moment. He laid down his palette and brushes deliberately; he crossed over to the little shrinking figure beside the window; put his arm about her waist. "Shall — shall I tell Judge Poynter you would rather stay here with me, Charlotte?" said Mr. Lawrence.

It was not a rapturous wooing. There was still light enough in the short winter afternoon to finish the picture after every thing else was settled. And Denis went back to his work. It was his first decidedly successful picture. "A charming bit of sentiment and color," the critics called it. It was bought by Goupl in the course of the following summer. He sold it very well. "As though there was any use in *that*, while there is all my money lying idle, and you will not even take me where I could spend it," Mrs. Charlotte observed disdainfully. They had been married over six months, and this was not the first remark of the kind which young Mrs. Lawrence had made. It had been a singularly unsuccessful marriage from the first. And this not because Charlotte was a badly-intentioned or even a bad-tempered woman. She would have made a happy wife to some other man, Lawrence would think at times. And then very likely he asked himself how it was that this poor little girl, with her exacting and unsympathetic nature, her cramped intensity of aim, should be doomed to this blind struggle with all the perplexities, the baffling disappointments, of such a life as his? It was not an easy question to answer. "For, after all, I am exactly the same, my poor little Charlotte! I am exactly what I was

when you wished — when you consented to marry me," he said to her one day; "I have not changed."

"Changed? No. But I thought you would," said Charlotte naïvely. And perhaps in those few words she had unconsciously summed up half of "the old woe o' the world."

It was at the end of one of their reiterated discussions upon the old, old subject — her desire to live in Paris. Paris! Like the recollection of some anterior existence, the name came back to Lawrence with all its old, luring suggestion of passionate delight. He shivered and closed his eyes. The face was there still — the old beautiful face. He stood up abruptly. "You cannot go. *I* have to content myself with home," with sudden faltering in the well-trained voice.

His wife sat working by the window, some elaborate mechanical work which somehow seemed a part of her. She looked up now, glancing at him with helpless irritation, with pale, persistent eyes.

"There was nothing to lose one's temper about," she said presently. "Goodness knows I don't expect you to agree with me, Denis. I wish you would sit down and take a book, or act like anybody else. You make my head ache walking up and down," pressing one thin white hand against her temples; and, after a moment's silence: "I am not going down to Graveport again, I suppose you know that, Denis? I am tired of the country; I hate it. And you must stay where I do this summer, do you hear? People are talking about you already," with fretful insistence, — "people are talking about the way you neglect me for your mother, and we have not been married a year."

And this was to go on all his life. He stood with his back turned upon her, looking through the gathering darkness at the stretch of empty road. He had sold his liberty for this. And other men, other men — his face changing suddenly — they were at the South those others, fighting, themselves a part of all the grandeur, the splendor, and stress of a heroic cause; while he —

the thin, complaining voice jarred on his nerves with cruel iteration — it was his part, he had chosen it, his part of all the possibilities of life.

He stood there a long time; there were two paths opening out in life before him; he stood there until he had made his choice. If there was temptation left in the old dreams, he forswore it that night; he thrust it from him. The life before him might be barren, but, come what might, he could live it like a man.

He looked up quietly. With a sudden revulsion of feeling he stooped and took his wife's hand in his. "I wish I could please you better, Charlotte," he said.

She was counting the stitches in her work; she glanced up, her lips still moving.

"Don't," she said petulantly, and moved away her shoulder.

It was a little thing, but it hurt him afterwards to remember it, for it was almost the last word they ever exchanged together.

Before nightfall Lawrence was speeding eastward in answer to an urgent telegram. It was not even his mother who had sent it, and with a terrible sinking of the heart he hastened on his journey, the slow night dragging on before him, and she, it might be, drifting beyond his reach.

It was an hour or two before morning when he reached Graveport. A foggy, summer night, "white with the whiteness of what is dead" — a night of ghastly silence, through which you rather felt than heard the low grind of the distant waves upon the beach. He reached the house, his footsteps echoing loudly down all the wet and silent street. He went in. The door had been left open; a light was flaring in the draught. There were voices and people in the hall; he passed them all unheeded, with rigid face, with slow and heavy footsteps — he was going to his mother. It was old Jenny who opened the door to him. There was a smell of incense in the room. He saw a white bed, some people standing about it.

"'Pears like as if she had been waitin' for you, Mars' Denis," the old woman said, her black face twitching convulsively; "waitin' for the turn o' the tide."

He went up to the bed. She was lying there very quietly, but she opened her eyes and looked at him as he bent over her. Her lips moved painfully: —

"Charlotte?"

He took her hand in his.

"Yes, dear, yes. We are very happy together," he said soothingly.

A light of sudden joy filled all the dying woman's face.

"My boy!" she said. She gathered up her strength in one supreme effort, and turned and laid her lips against his hand.

The man in black rose from his knees and made the sign of the cross devoutly.

"The Blessed Virgin give you strength to bear your loss, my son," he said; and Denis looked at him stupidly.

"She is gone. Gone!" with a pitiful, incredulous smile.

Old Jenny had dragged herself moaning to the window; she threw it wide open now with the dumb, wordless superstition of her race. The wind had risen; the night air rushed in clammy and chill. The harassed trees creaked painfully through the silence, their dark arms tossing wildly against the paling sky. Already the swift summer night was ended; already the light was breaking over the storm-vexed waves; the morning tide was ebbing to the sea.

And presently came morning — the cheerful common day, filling the world with pleasant stir and sound; and later on Judge Poynter had arrived, coming back from the dead woman's room with a face which moved even Denis to faint companionship of sorrow. It was the first thing that had roused him; and now, towards evening, he began to write letters. There were despatches to be sent; his sisters to be summoned. His wife —

All day he had been conscious of people moving

about him; moving with decent and kindly pretence of sorrow, with lowered and respectful voices, and muffled footsteps that seemed to jar slowly, one by one, upon his brain.

Now, as he paused to listen, it seemed to him that these footsteps moved more hastily; there were people crowding before the house. Well, it was nothing to him; and there was still his wife to write to. His wife!

The door opened and let pass two men; one of them was Judge Poynter. "It was kind of him to come again, very kind," Lawrence said, getting up mechanically, and facing him, his hand grasping the back of a chair. He had been writing to Charlotte —

The Judge looked at his companion. "Tell him," he said hoarsely; he threw himself down in a chair and covered his face. Denis watched him curiously, he stood there watching him through all the broken story which followed, and by a sort of double consciousness, taking it all in the while with ghastly clearness of detail — Charlotte's impatience at his sudden journey, her jealous following. "She was always difficult to manage, poor girl, poor girl," the Judge broke in with a sob — and then the crowded transport train — a broken rail — an accident.

"It was the will of God, my son," the priest said solemnly; and Denis turned and looked at him. The will of God! and this man, this good-hearted Irishman with his coarse red hands knew all about it? The will of God? — repeating the words after him with patient effort to understand — the will of God? and poor, futile, little Charlotte *dead!*

"My poor boy," the Judge said, wringing his hand, "my dear boy, if you could only make an effort — rouse yourself." There was something in the patience of the young face that turned and looked upon him which struck the old man dumb.

And after they had left him — the Judge coming back from the door again to ask what he could do — when

they had left him alone it was still this same shocked sense of the incongruous which would keep uppermost. His mother — his mother was a saint, the tears coming slow and burning to his eyes; but Charlotte, poor little Charlotte, crushed out of life, alone, the familiar little voice hushed, its complainings ended! A week ago those thin, tenacious hands had seemed strong enough to shape all the coming years for him, and now —

The room was growing full of shadows. He rose mechanically and walked over to the window and looked out. The habitual attitude brought back its own shock of remembrance. Again he saw a white road stretching out through the twilight, and leading — where? Some boys were tramping cheerily homeward, singing in rude chorus the refrain of a soldier's song. He beat time to the words unconsciously, the light coming steadily into his eyes. He drew a deep breath, and stood up suddenly. Life was not all his own yet it seemed; not his own while there was work — that work — to do.

CHAPTER XIX.

"IL N'EST D'AMOUR SI TRISTE QUI N'AIT SON SOUVENIR."

AND, after all, they met in the bazaar. Mrs. Thayer had been buying silks. "For if Aunt Van arrives here to-morrow or next day — and Tom says there is every chance of it — I had better have all my money spent before she gets here. I don't want her to think me extravagant," she observed to Constance pensively. "If I could only decide whether scarlet or this pale-yellow was most becoming. And gold thread? Do you really think now gold embroidery would not look theatrical?" with a perplexed frown.

They were deep in the bazaars of Damascus — deep in those cool, dim, vaulted spaces, with the lustre of

silks, the gleam of metal and porcelain about them, and the odor of gums and curious spices filling the dusty air — in a world where all the business of life is carried on in fashions and under conditions totally different from ours, and dignity, tranquillity, and splendor are jostled by strange and loathsome shapes.

"Now, *do* you think gold thread theatrical?" says Fanny with her busy frown.

Constance gave some vague answer. They were sitting upon the small, bright carpet beside the attentive cross-legged merchant; and between them lay a glistening heap of fine tissues and stuffs and silks. Opposite them another tall olive-skinned merchant, in an apple-green robe, was buying sweetmeats at a stand, on either side of which a loose, white net was stretched across the shops whose owners were at prayers. A string of donkeys wandered slowly by, their trailing loads of brushwood just clearing the houses on either side; and now the gentleman in green had found an acquaintance — they stopped to speak. A low, mysterious call, the imperative tap of a bronzed finger on her arm, made Constance start and look round. A barefooted Arab was standing beside her; he smiled furtively, unrolled one end of his dingy, voluminous turban.

"O Fanny!" the girl said, catching her breath. It was a roughly-set turquoise ring, a marvel of blue.

Mrs. Thayer asked the price.

"No good man, my lady. You go jewel bazaar bymeby," the guide answered evasively. The man took back his ring with serene indifference. He thrust his hand into his breast and drew out a mass of bracelets tinkling with golden coins. "*Mafeesh?*" he sauntered away a few steps and leaned against a pillar; a ray of sunlight touched the tarnished embroidery of his dress, its white folds fell around him in straight lines; not a muscle moved; he looked as though he might have been standing there for the last thousand years.

And now a troop of white-veiled women came gliding down the dusky street, their footsteps falling noiselessly

upon the beaten earth, flitting from shadow to sunlight, from gloom to gold, as dumb and vivid as a dream. And now a broad-hatted Englishman trotted by on his donkey. He closed his umbrella before the sherbet-seller, and instantly a pet sheep, henna-stained and all crossed and barred with patches of crimson dye, rushed up and knocked it out of his hand.

"Dear me! very extraordinary animal that," said the stranger mildly, putting up his eyeglass to look reprovingly at the sheep.

Presently a beautiful Jew boy, with straight, small features and scarlet lips, went sauntering past, carrying a painter's box and traps, and in a moment more the painter himself followed — a young man, and talking to Major Thayer. Something his companion said seemed to amuse him; he laughed, he took off his hat, and stood facing the wind.

"Why, Constance," said Fanny, with a sudden start — "why, good heavens! Constance, it's Mr. Lawrence."

Miss Varley looked up quietly. "I know," bending suddenly over to look at some embroidered stuff.

The two men were talking busily.

"But look here, Thayer; that's all rubbish, you know," the younger man was saying rather earnestly as they came within earshot of the ladies; "that Persian brand is all a mistake. Why, ten times out of twelve you don't even get real tobacco, and I've heard lots of fellows — "

He looked up. Mrs. Thayer was beckoning to him.

"You haven't quite forgotten us I hope, Mr. Lawrence?" giving him her hand with a brilliant smile.

He made some appropriate answer.

"And you, Miss Varley," glancing rather doubtfully at the girl's grave face, "you have not forgotten — "

She did not smile in return.

"No," putting out her hand shyly, "I haven't forgotten."

Their fingers met, the color flushing suddenly across

her throat and cheek. She turned aside, pulling about the silks upon her lap with tremulous fingers.

The young man stood and looked at her a moment in silence. He was a trifle disappointed in her manner it seemed.

"We can't stop. I'm going with Lawrence to see some famous bits for sketches. I think I will begin one to-day, if the light holds out," said the Major, looking about him critically. "Lawrence is on his way to some café by the riverside. I met him by accident, and brought him here quite by force, I assure you, Fanny — "

"Oh, of course. Mrs. Thayer would know how much truth there was likely to be in that," the young man assented carelessly. He reached out his hand and pulled down one end of a silken *cufieh*.

"You ought to buy some of those coarser Bedawy handkerchiefs, Mrs. Thayer. The color is simply superb. And don't you like old things better? This modern stuff is all very commonplace, as poor and mechanical in design as a Roman scarf," tossing back the silk contemptuously. He glanced up and down the street, then turned again to Constance. "It is too early yet to ask you what you think of Damascus?" with a doubtful inflection in his voice.

This time she looked at him.

"I have not seen it. I think it must be the most beautiful city in the world," she said, her face lighting up with a sudden, swift smile of delight.

Mr. Lawrence was very much pleased. He came and leaned against the wall beside her.

"You must have lots of news to tell me about the people at home," he said, and incontinently fell to talking about Damascus. He was going to a certain native café. "I go there very often. It isn't the sort of place to see in a crowd, you know," with an imperceptible glance towards Mrs. Thayer, "but I wish you were going there with us. I should like to have you see it as it is looking now, when there are only a few shadowy old

men in the darkest corners, and the sky is growing pale and cool, and all the sunshine has gone off the river. This bazaar is stifling, but out there you will find the wind again, and the waving of trees, and the motion of running water. Perhaps, if you stay here long enough, you will hear the people at your hotel say they have been to these cafés; but that is all nonsense. They go there in mobs, and the dragomen bully them. But now if you went there with me — It is all cool and very silent, you know, and there are tables out on the platform above the water where one might sit —"

"Yes!" She leaned forward eagerly. "But can I go? can I go — really?"

"Well," he said laughing, "why not? If the Major is willing to take you —"

There was little or nothing to remember in all the walk which followed, but this girl remembered it all her life. She was very silent that afternoon, listening for the most part very quietly to the talk of her companions. It was more than three years since she had heard his voice!

"Are you tired? I am afraid the walk has been too much for you," the Major asked her once; and Lawrence smiled to himself at the question, for indeed there was but small suggestion of fatigue in the still contentment of her face. And as for her — well, she was happy, as one is happy perhaps twice or thrice in a lifetime. The strange and beautiful figures about her passed and repassed like the pale figures of a dream. Once a line of heavy-laden camels went swaying by, and Lawrence laid his hand upon her arm.

"Take care!" he said.

They were standing close together for an instant, her dress brushing against him when she moved. Her arm trembled, her hands growing cold and nerveless under his touch. She looked away with sudden shyness. She had not seen him for three years!

And when they got to the café: "This is a very nice place for your sketch, you know, Major. I've done

those buildings myself. But of course Miss Varley can't wait for you out here. There 'll be a mob about you before you know where you are," the young man remarked.

"Oh, of course not," said Major Thayer, good-humoredly. The old fellow was very fond of Constance. It was he who suggested to Miss Varley that they should wait for him on the wooden platform outside near the river. "I daresay Lawrence won't mind looking after you for a few minutes. I shall be right here; in the next room, you know," with sudden guilty remembrance of Fanny's injunctions.

They went out on the platform. A very old man with a black turban and a long white beard rose up and bowed gravely at their entrance.

"That is an old acquaintance of mine. An Armenian merchant. He has been giving me lessons in Persian of late; I daresay he is waiting for me now," nodding to him carelessly as they passed. "Sit here. I am going to order some Damascene sweetmeats for you. You know you were always as fond as a baby of sweets — "

"But I don't want to keep you from your lesson," the girl said shyly.

"And if I want to be kept?"

"I see a rose — the first rose of the season. Summer has come," she said incoherently, bending suddenly forward to look at the full and silent stream.

The water rushed swiftly by without a ripple or a sound; only the delicate-footed wind kept up a low, continuous murmuring amongst the deep water-splashed foliage of the trees, and high up above them a single palm leaned in full sunlight from a garden-wall.

"It is such a beautiful world!" the girl said suddenly, looking up with a level, radiant glance.

"I should like to make a drawing of you some day," Lawrence told her presently. "You will pose for me some time? And are you going to stay? You have told me nothing of your plans."

"Aunt Van is coming. One can't have Aunt Van and settled plans at the same time, you know," with a careless laugh. "But you, Mr. Lawrence? You never used to have plans once, I know," resting her cheek upon her hand, and looking at him frankly.

Mr. Lawrence did not answer for a few minutes. Some chance turn of her head or hand, some faltering inflection in her voice, had struck him with a sudden flash of recollection, evoking another face from out the past. The likeness troubled him.

"I? my plans?" he repeated absently. "I had nearly decided to go to Constantinople, but now —"

"Now?" catching her breath anxiously.

He frowned slightly, still keeping his eyes fixed upon the river.

"I have an idea for a picture — You remember that talk we had about my painting once? I have often thought of what you said that day. It is enough to make a man stick to his work at any cost to have been believed in in that fashion," turning to her with one of his rare, sudden smiles.

She could hardly trust herself to speak about that past, she remembered it all so well. But he alluded to it constantly — lightly, easily, with a blurring over of details, a confusion of names and dates she invariably noted, and without comment.

"It scarcely seems three years ago, does it?" he said to her once. "What have you been doing all that time? You have not changed in the least," looking at her with slow scrutiny.

"I have been living at home," said Constance, simply. "I think I have done nothing but read. You said — I remember somebody told me once that women never read any thing through. I don't think any one could say that of me — now," with a low, happy laugh.

There was nothing especial, nothing to remember in all that silent, idle afternoon, and yet they both remembered it.

"It is so long since I have seen any one to speak to

beside a lot of men. I am really very glad you have come," said Lawrence. "While I am here you must let me show you something of the city; there are lots of out-of-the-way places where I can take you — you and the Major and Mrs. Thayer."

"Jack — Mr. Stuart is travelling with us," said Constance abruptly.

She had utterly forgotten his existence until that moment.

Mr. Lawrence was looking at her with attention.

"Mr. Stuart? ah, yes. Ferris told me that he was — that he was with you."

He got up and stood leaning over the balustrade, looking down at the water. He put out his hand and plucked a rose from the trellis beside him.

"You know the story about roses?" he said, crumpling the crimson petals in his hand.

"The story —?"

"It is part of an Arabian love-song," said Lawrence, absently. "How, when Eve was driven out of Eden, she lingered outside at the closed gate praying the angel for a single flower to carry with her into exile. And the angel looked at her, and because she was so exceeding fair he threw her out a single red rose — a rose of Paradise. And ever since that day every descendant of Eve, at some time of his life — and once — has smelt the perfume of that flower, and after that — after that and until he dies — well! There are earthly roses, fortunately," looking down with an odd expression at the crumpled flower.

"You are crushing it," said Constance, putting out her hand.

He did not see the gesture. The old Armenian merchant had been watching them with patient gravity since they entered. When Lawrence moved he laid down his pipe, and stood up. He approached them now, and bowed, standing deferentially aside and not looking at Constance.

"You will excuse me, Miss Varley," the young

man said, "if I leave you an instant to speak to Ahmed?"

And then as they were talking together he took out his pocket-book to look over some notes, and as he held it open in his hand the wind caught up a crumpled piece of paper and threw it at Miss Varley's feet.

The young man rejoined her again in a moment; he was looking rather annoyed.

"I told you old Ahmed was a merchant, didn't I? Well, he is going almost immediately. His caravan is nearly ready now; he starts for Bagdad within three days."

She answered nothing to this. Old Ahmed and his movements were equally indifferent to her.

"But, oh, Mr. Lawrence," she said suddenly, "is not this paper yours? I picked it up —"

He took it from her and looked at it. It was the letter he had been reading an hour or two before.

"Yes, it is mine," he said in a low voice, and after a slight pause. He held it in his hand in an undecided way for a minute or two, then tore it deliberately across into strips and flung them into the river.

"Do you know what sort of a thing is a protested note, Miss Varley?"

"No."

"Well, that was one," pointing to the fragments and speaking in a harder voice than she had ever heard him use before. "There are natures," he went on presently, "so absolutely truthful that they make every wilful fascination seem tawdry as a stage jewel in comparison. It is fresh air and sunshine after 'the perfumed shade of the forbidden tree.' One respects such natures, Miss Varley," looking at her with a great expression of liking in his eyes.

By this time the Major had finished his picture. He came in, holding it in his hand, and very much pleased.

"Not so bad, not so bad, I think, eh, Lawrence?" contemplating the sketch fondly at arm's-length. He glanced about him curiously. "So this is the sort of

place you talk about, is it? Nice sort of place for a hot day, perhaps. I don't see much in it myself. You are coming to dine with us to-night, my boy? Nonsense! but you must. Mrs. Thayer told me to bring you; and we don't disobey orders, do we, Constance? Hollo! you 've lost your rose," pointing to some scattered petals on the floor.

"Mr. Lawrence never gave it to me," said Constance.

When they reached the hotel, the first person they saw was Jack Stuart, leaning against the door-post, smoking. He threw away his cigar and took off his hat as Constance approached him, but otherwise he did not trouble himself to move.

"Hollo, Jack! Why, where have you been, and what have you been doing with yourself?" said the Major.

"I 've been amusing myself," said Jack shortly. It seemed an unsuccessful form of entertainment by his voice.

"You ought to have been with us. Lawrence took us to a café, and — let me see; I think you must remember having met Mr. Lawrence?"

The two young men looked up at each other and nodded distantly.

"I saw you at the Farm, I think?"

"I believe so," said Denis carelessly.

They went into the courtyard together; the light was stronger here than in the narrow street. When they reached the fountain, Stuart turned and looked with keen attention first at Lawrence and then at the girl. He was a shrewd observer of faces, and something in her attitude as they came up the street, some slight expression of languor in the proud and erect carriage, the turn of her head, the shy, swift smile with which she answered some chance remark of her companion — nothing, every thing — had struck him with some sudden intimation of the truth. "But proving nothing," he told himself, "proving nothing," looking down at the plashing water with a quick, nervous shiver, as though the summer night had suddenly grown cold.

"My glove, please, Mr. Stuart. It is there by your foot," said Constance, turning. Her voice, too, had changed; it was gentle as ever, but tremulous, vibrating with the same baffling intangible sense of change. He stooped and handed her the glove, looking straight into her eyes as he did so. The color shifted uneasily upon her cheek.

"It is some lover's quarrel," thought Lawrence, curiously, watching them with coldly critical eyes. He took the Major by the arm. "You have never finished that story about old Johnson? I have not seen him since we were in the hospital together — swearing Johnson we used to call him there," turning aside to leave the others freer. And it might have been the Major's story which brought that look upon his face.

The twilight deepened into darkness, a cool and odorous darkness, full of faint scent of flowers and the sound of water falling. The wind was hushed; the lamp hardly flickered by the doorway, but from time to time the small, new leaves overhead rustled suddenly and were still.

They were sitting out in the courtyard after dinner, all of them — sitting or lying upon the cushions of the divan, and Davenant was at Miss Varley's feet. There was something about this girl which appealed irresistibly to the young man's imagination — a simple largeness of line and joyousness of nature and repose. "She is as fresh and harmonious and passionless as the early morning," he said one day quite seriously to Ferris. And now, as they lounged in the uncertain moonlight — for now the young crescent moon had climbed above the tree-tops, and the thread of water glistened, the fig-leaf shadows fell upon the marble floor — the charm of her personality possessed him; he offered her a secret homage of sentiment as delicate and elusive as those shadows.

Her fan had fallen to the ground; he opened it wide and held it up against the moonlight.

"I wrote some verses for your fan, for your Japanese

fan, the other day," he said dreamily; and after a moment, and as no one answered, he began to repeat some lines, half to himself, and in a low and singularly well-modulated voice: —

A flowery fan for a white, flower hand
(White cranes flying across the moon) —
A breath of wind from a windless land —
A breath in the breathless noon.

Flowers that blossom — a wind that blows
(White cranes sailing across the sky) —
A sigh for the light love, the love that goes,
A flower for the loves that die!

"Very pretty," said Fanny, as he finished, "very pretty, indeed. But I 'm afraid you will think me sadly stupid for asking, and indeed it is hardly a fair question to ask, — but what did you intend it to mean, Mr. Davenant?"

"Ah, but I never explain things," said Davenant, in his most languid tone.

There was an awkward silence, broken at last by the Major's voice, inquiring of Lawrence if he knew what had become of their old regimental chaplain.

"Oh, he gave up the army, and went to Paris after the war. He is more High Church than ever now, and has an especial day for hearing young ladies confess. I heard about him only the other day," said Lawrence carelessly, "and, curiously enough, I heard of him from a man he had just converted."

The Major laughed.

"May I ask what there is so curious in that?" said Mrs. Thayer, rather sharply.

"Well," rejoined Lawrence very calmly, "perhaps there is not much in it after all. Tom was only remembering some old story about our chaplain — the Infant Samuel, the soldiers called him. I don't throw any doubt upon the man's conversion myself, you will please observe. Indeed, I think it highly probable. He is by no means the first man who has been saved

by the voice of a humble preacher since the days when Balaam was saved by the voice of an ass."

"Oh!" said Fanny blankly.

And then a moment later: "Constance dear, it is really growing quite chilly, and I see you have no wrap," she said softly. "Don't you think it is time to leave the gentlemen to their cigars — and their stories?"

"Mrs. Thayer, if you mean me, I am mute from this time henceforth," said Lawrence laughing.

Mr. Stuart sprang up: "I will fetch Constance a shawl," glad of any excuse for doing something. He came back in a moment. "This is yours, I think?" he said, but he did not offer to put the wrap about her, and it was Ferris who took it out of his hand.

"Mr. Stuart has exhibited his taste. You should always wear white, Miss Varley," said Lawrence, "soft, flexible, white things like this," taking up a corner of the drapery. It was almost the first time he had spoken to her that evening, and she turned to him at once with a soft, sudden stir of pleasure.

"Yes," she answered simply, drawing the shawl more closely about her.

The moon had long since vanished behind the dark and rustling trees; the sky was pale and starlit and very silent.

"A night for music," said Davenant, "for the sound of falling water, and the clear notes of stringed instruments, and song."

"You used to sing once upon a time, Lawrence?"

"Oh, yes, do!" said Mrs. Thayer suavely. She had a strong antipathy to Lawrence.

The young man hesitated a moment; he looked up at Constance. "I don't know," he began doubtfully; and then, as still she did not speak, he moved slightly, and leaning on his elbow, looking up at the pale, luminous sky above him, and in a clear and singularly flexible voice, he began to sing: —

Wie heisst König Ringang's Töchterlein?
Rohtraut, Schön-Rohtraut!

In the faint half-light Stuart could see the girl start and lean forward at the first familiar notes; but what could he, what could any of them, know of the deep and passionate sadness and longing which filled her heart at the sound of those old and unforgotten words?

> Darauf sie ritten schweigend heim,
> Rohtraut, Schön-Rohtraut!
> Es jauchzt der Knab' in seinem Sinn;
> Und würdst du heute Kaiserin
> Mich sollst nicht Kränken:
> Ihr tausend Blätter im Walde wisst
> Ich hab' Schön-Rohtraut's Mund geküsst —
> Schweig stille, mein Herz, schweig still!

He had begun carelessly enough, but as the sentiment of the lines touched his imagination, his voice deepened and gained in tone. The last words were given with a curious and passionate restraint, and as he ended — and for a moment no one spoke — only the splash of the fountain sounded through the silence.

"That is a very old song, you know," he said at last, turning to Constance.

"I remember it," the girl said quickly; and then, as Mrs. Thayer moved, she too arose, and they all walked on together towards the house.

The "Good-nights" were said at the foot of the stairway leading to the upper gallery surrounding the court.

"Good-night, Constance dear," said Mrs. Thayer, leaning over this balustrade.

The girl was waiting while Lawrence lighted her candle.

"Well, Constance, good-night," said the Major, turning to follow the young men to the door.

A lamp was burning at the foot of the staircase; its light shone full upon her face. She was strangely pale, and her eyes were dewy and dark with emotion; they glistened in the light as she took her candle from Denis.

"Good-night, Mr. Lawrence," she said shyly. She

went up a step or two and looked back at him, "Good-night!"

The young man started. "Won't you give me your hand?" he said. He just touched her fingers. "Good-night, Constance."

She lifted her eyes for an instant and looked at him. Without another word she turned and went slowly up the stairs. Her room fronted the street. The window was open, and the flickering flare of a street-lamp streamed redly in as she entered. She locked the door behind her, and set her candle down upon the table. A mirror hung before her; she leaned both hands upon the table, she looked long and earnestly at the reflection in the tarnished frame.

"After three years!" she said aloud.

The sound of her own voice startled her. She gazed fixedly at the face in the glass, and, as she gazed, a wave of happy color swept over her delicate cheek.

"Good-night, Constance, you happy Constance!" she whispered under her breath. Her face burned; she put up her hands before it. She leaned over with a sudden motion and blew out the light.

CHAPTER XX.

ONE SIDE OF THE QUESTION.

MEANWHILE the young men had gathered about the street door; they were talking and lighting their pipes. It was rather late that evening to go anywhere, would not Mr. Stuart come round to their lodgings with them and have something, Mr. Ferris suggested politely? There was some very fair Lebanon wine.

"Oh, bother the rooms!" said Davenant quickly; "come round to the café and hear some native music."

"The dancing-girls here were not worth looking at

after Cairo," Mr. Lawrence remarked confidentially to his cigar.

"Thank you," said Stuart stiffly, "I'm engaged;" and there was an intentional emphasis of refusal in his manner which made the others turn and stare.

"Well," began Davenant, as Jack walked off, "well, of all the cheeky—"

"Be quiet!" said Ferris, in a stage whisper. "Perhaps," he went on aloud, "we may be more fortunate with you than with your cousin, Major?"

As for Stuart, he went down by the river; he sat on the parapet of the bridge and stared at the dark, swift water rushing by through the night, with the dumbness of baffled desire in a nature which knew no expression for itself but action. All the strong common-sense, which was the dominant quality in the young man's character, warned him against the encroaching influence of Constance.

"If I can't do any thing else I can go away," he thought desperately. "I'll go away and leave her," taking up a stone and flinging it savagely at the nearest pariah dog. The animal limped away with a sharp yelp of discomfiture, and even in the depths of his misery the young man could not restrain a smile. It died away as suddenly as it had come. He turned back towards the hotel. There was a light still shining in her room as he came down the street; but even as he turned to look at it again a shadow moved quickly across the curtain, and the candle was blown out.

The courtyard was empty and quiet enough when he reached it. He met no one on his way to his room but a sleepy servant, who sprang up from the mat on which he was dreaming to salute the young man gravely as he passed. The others had long since gone their different ways.

"Oh, come along and take a walk, Lawrence," Davenant had suggested, as they passed down the narrow street.

Ferris laughed. "I believe you two fellows never

sleep at all," he said with lazy amusement. And so the young men parted.

It was a quiet and very beautiful night. They strolled along the river's bank for some distance beyond the town. The sky overhead was pale and luminous with the wan radiance of the stars, and out here in the open fields the world seemed larger; the damp wind from the water blew more freshly about them.

"Ah," said Davenant, "this was indeed worth coming for;" taking off his hat and letting the breeze play coolly about his bared forehead and throat. He threw himself down on the short, close grass by the river's brink. "Sit down, Lawrence, won't you?"

They sat there a long time in silence, listening to the water's stealthy flow. The river poured by them through the open fields, dark and mobile and dumb.

"Black as the waters of accursed Styx," said Davenant dreamily. He turned, leaning upon his elbow: "Lawrence!"

"I hear."

"That girl is in love with you," abruptly.

Mr. Lawrence did not answer for a moment. "If you mean that for a joke, Davenant —"

"A joke! I? and on such a night, in this divine silence? I would as soon — I would as soon think of writing a parody on the 'Antigone,'" the young man said, indignantly. And then, as Denis did not answer: "I said that girl was in love with you," he repeated placidly; "and so she is. I don't think she knows it, though. I hope she won't find it out, myself. You would not wish her to, either, if you could only have seen the divine melancholy in her eyes while you were singing. I thought of Shelley's 'Prometheus': —

> Thine eyes are like the deep, blue, boundless heaven
> Contracted to two circles underneath,
> Their long, fine lashes, dark, far, measureless,
> Orb within orb, and line through line enwoven.

And then, don't you remember? Panthea asks, —

> Why lookest thou as if a spirit passed?

No, I hope that she will never know that she has loved you."

Lawrence moved uneasily.

"I don't know whether you are aware of it, my boy, but you are certainly talking greater rubbish than usual, it seems to me," forcing a careless laugh.

He took up a stone and flung it into the water.

"Miss Varley — and I only say it to put a stop to a — a ridiculous discussion into which her name should not be brought — Miss Varley is engaged to be married to Stuart," bringing out the last words with great distinctness.

"Well?" said Davenant simply.

The reply staggered him.

"Well — why, man, don't you understand English? She is engaged to be married, I tell you; has been in love with the fellow for years for all I know to the contrary; and then, because she listens to a beautiful song with some human sentiment, you want me to believe — you might as well tell me I was in love with Mrs. Thayer," with a short laugh.

"Mrs. Thayer," said Davenant seriously, "is a very pretty woman. She reminds me of nothing so much as of a paper doll. I can see no use for natures of that quality in the world, if it is not to serve to heighten and intensify, by force of contrast, the divine anguish of thinkers and poets. Yes, they have their use, perhaps, after all. But as for Miss Varley — are all her people Americans, Lawrence?"

"No; I don't know."

"Because it would be an interesting fact to verify. As a mere matter of opinion, I feel convinced she has European blood in her. Perhaps on her mother's side?"

"I don't know," said Mr. Lawrence.

"You see," said Davenant, thoughtfully, "the few American women I have known impressed me rather differently. It's a commonplace to say that they lack sentiment, but a commonplace fact. They are lovely,

but they have no hold upon the imagination ; their very beauty affects me like the keen and brilliant sunshine of a windy day. Now, Miss Varley — to go back to what we were saying — you 're not asleep, Lawrence ? "

" No."

" Miss Varley is quite different. When I look at that girl and realize the beautiful artistic capacity for suffering, and for deep, passionate emotion in that nature, and then — when I look at Mr. Stuart and reflect upon the hideously comfortable and *bourgeois* happiness he will stifle her under — Lawrence," said Davenant, raising himself up and speaking with a mournful solemnity, " I feel as though I were seeing some piece of rare and exquisite Venetian glass — some thin, priceless, wave-tinted marvel of beauty — given over into the hands of a German beer-drinker. I feel as though I were witnessing a sacrilege."

" Oh, come now," said Lawrence sharply, " Stuart isn't a bad fellow in his way."

" Bad ? oh, dear no. He 's quite incapable of badness, poor devil ! " said Davenant, with serene compassion. " He hasn't even the consciousness of his superb brute force. Think of the calm, sweet exultation of a Greek in such perfection of physical power ! And he ! I was looking at him this evening ; why the fellow does not even know how handsome he is," with a faint smile of contempt.

" Ah, well, other people are not so blind, perhaps," Lawrence suggested with a short laugh. He rolled over and leaned his face upon his hands, looking down at the swift-moving darkness below him. The very silence of the night seemed full of remembrance and subtle suggestion. He moved uneasily. " You are ready to go home, Davenant ? "

" I was thinking," the young man said dreamily, " if I were richer, and ten years older, I should marry Miss Varley myself."

" *You* marry Miss Varley ! "

" Oh, there are objections, I know." He spoke

placidly, and precisely in the manner with which he would have discussed some old picture. "There are many other emotions I wish to experience before I marry — emotions absolutely essential to the artistic consummation of a life. I was thinking more of Miss Varley when I spoke. And yet, do you know, I can quite well imagine that Mr. Stuart would be an agreeable lover? He's a good-natured creature, and very pleasant to look at, and love — modern love I mean — not the fatal, demoniac possession of the Greek poets, but the love of these latter days — sad with insatiable desire, faint with pity, and over-shadowed with the awful sense of its own import and brevity. The modern passion of love," said Mr. Davenant reflectively, "is, to my thinking, like the mirage of the desert — a semblance, a reflection of far-off beauty cast upon shifting sands."

"You have tried it, of course?" said Lawrence, dryly.

"And in all probability," Davenant continued — he did not pay the smallest attention to the interruption — "in all probability they will be married, and be as disgustingly contented with the polite inanities of life as all the other members of society one knows. Still, I don't know, I have some hope for Miss Varley."

"Some hope that she may be picturesquely miserable, perhaps?"

"A hope that this unconscious love of hers — and I really can assure you that the higher part of that girl's nature is in love with you, Lawrence — a hope, I say, that this love may prove a saving influence in her future life — a beautiful grave in which she will keep her soul, as in a place out of sight — a holy place, 'full of the sound of the sorrow of years.' I think, in your place, I should not have allowed that" — mildly — "and yet, perhaps, you are right. It may be one of those sublime sacrifices to self which art demands. Your life is formed already, and it might be very fatal to a man's artistic development to marry young, don't you think?"

Mr. Lawrence did not answer. He was quietly stretched out on the grass listening. No other man alive would have been allowed to speak to him in this fashion, he thought; but this boy, Davenant, Claude — why, his very unconsciousness of offence privileged him. He lay there a few minutes longer, quite motionless. Perhaps he was waiting to hear if Davenant had no more to say; but as the younger man remained silent, he got up presently with some inarticulate exclamation and walked away. Davenant let him go without a word.

He walked on restlessly. It was a warm, still night, but he shivered nervously as he flung himself down beside the river, pressing both hands before his face, with a resolute effort to think it over calmly and dispassionately, this strange revelation he had heard.

And, to begin with, what truth was there in it? At another time he might have scoffed at the very idea, passing it over as the idle chatter of a romantic boy; but here, to-night, with the recollection of the look she had given him still vividly before him — no, it was not all a jest! — with a sudden curious thrill of excitement. He was not in the least in love with Constance? No! He asked himself the question gravely, and the answer was still the same. In love! Why, up to this morning he had quite forgotten the girl's existence. And she had been a child when he had known her before, — a mere child; and then to suppose that she would have remembered him all these years! It was preposterous, — looking up with a half-apologetic smile at his own folly.

He got up, humming an air carelessly, and pacing to and fro along the path between the thin, dark trees.

He thrust his hand in his pocket and took out his pipe. A quiet smoke would set him all right, perhaps. He was nervous, uneasy. "There must be thunder in the air"— looking about him curiously.

The starry sky overhead was clear, and bare of clouds. The sleeping city lay dark, huddled, and silent at his

feet. The river flowed between him and the houses, — flowed noiseless and shadowy between the ramparts of its banks. There was nothing stirring in these wide, open fields, — nothing but the damp river-wind touching his face like a caress.

He let his hand drop irresolutely to his side. What did this boy know of the real needs of men and women? "*This world and life's too big to pass for a dream*," he muttered to himself, passing his hand impatiently across his face. But was it a dream?

All day long he seemed to have been under the influence of some inexplicable emotion, — something of too impalpable a nature to be grasped and throttled and thrust away; and Davenant's words seemed only to have given the phantom form and substance, and yet — it was absurd. He ought not to think of it. He would not think of it.

He sat down beside the bank again, and looked moodily at the water. Well, granted the worst; granted that she was in love with him — unconsciously in love, had Davenant said? — what then? There was this Stuart she was engaged to marry — a pleasant, manly fellow. Davenant abused him, to be sure; but then, what did that signify? Claude was full of these odd dislikes. A man whom all her friends approved of; a good match, too, he believed, — trying to remember some story he had heard about Stuart's father. Yes, a good match, and madly in love with her, — that was easy enough to see. A suitable marriage in every way, his reason told him. And as for Miss Varley — well, granting again the girl had had some other fancy; why, women got over these fancies in time; they got over most things — with a cold smile.

Ordinary women, yes; but Constance? The sweet, grave face rose up before him distinctly, — a face as loyal and simple as a child's. She had always seemed to him the most absolutely truthful creature he had ever known, this little friend of his, — thinking of her with a touch of tenderness as of a child. But was it a child's

face that had looked into his on the stairs that night? In that one brief glance he seemed to have read all the passion of surrender of a human soul. He thought of it now with a certain reticence, with a sense of profanation, a chivalric respect for the woman's heart she had betrayed. He could soon turn this sentiment into love, if he liked; he could do that, — with a sudden flash of troubled delight, — but who was he to do it? The young, noble figure seemed to his imagination like one moving apart, looking down with beautiful, ignorant eyes upon the turmoil and stain of life; and was it for him to bring her down to its level? And then the thought would come again — he did not love her. No; a whole world of dead desires, "old memories, faiths infirm and dead," seemed lying deep between him and the glance of those tender, wistful eyes. But she was a good girl — very good: poor little Constance!

And then, for the first time in years, he thought long and steadily of his wife, going back over the old story with grave compassion and regret. And, good God! how little he had missed her! He thought how he had seen her that last day, full of eager demands and fancies, — jealous, poor child, of his very mother's love! Her life seemed to have gone out suddenly, — a mere pebble tossed into the sea, gone down out of sight. Lawrence was not what is technically called a religious man; but he had something of the soul, something of the sensitive imagination, of a poet. He looked up now with a sudden passionate appeal at that mute and fatal sky.

The after years came back to him in that strange, unfamiliar hush before the dawn. One after one the fruitless years came back with question of their use. One after one the years of his early youth returned. He saw himself again a boy at home; a young man facing life, — eager, expectant, self-reliant, ready to answer to any call, full of all generous enthusiasm and purpose; and all this but such a short time ago! And how could it have been otherwise? He was not a man addicted

to morbid self-study, — the very inherent logic of his French blood would have saved him from that; but to-night he seemed, as never before, to look back upon his past experience as on an inevitable and fatal progress from the delight of desire to the quiet acceptance of defeat. For these were things which were over for him now.

He looked the fact steadily in the face, — saw it as any other practical man could have done, unbiassed by its relation to himself. It was over — looking up gravely — and Constance, perhaps, all unconscious, had saved him from the greatest mistake of his life. A vestal virgin — with a quiet smile at Davenant's fancy — a vestal virgin, rescuing another's existence by the mere fact of her own serene presence.

He got up from his place and walked slowly back to where he had left Davenant. The lad had fallen asleep by the river. One arm was thrown back under his head, and his pale, large-featured face was uncovered to the sky. He was sleeping as quietly as a tired boy. Lawrence did not awaken him. He stood looking down at him a moment, listening to his peaceful breathing. How many other fellows he had seen lying just so on those old battle-fields at the South: men who had given their lives for something, while he —

And there were chances for him yet, — yes, chances. He had plenty of talent: something of the old hunger for work coming back at the thought.

He sat down presently, clasping his hands behind his head, and staring up above him at the paling stars. Yes, a vestal. Davenant was right. The day might come, perhaps, when he should tell her of it. It should come, if she chose, — an eager smile coming over his mouth and eyes. If she chose. And if not, — well, the child's life would not have been disturbed for nothing; and she should never know. There should never be a word to bring a look of trouble into that grave, sweet, innocent face.

The brief southern night had been waning while he

pondered. Already there was a breath of morning in the blue-gray air about him; the sky was paling; the river ran more blackly across the open fields, with here and there the glitter of a star upon its rapid current. In the last few minutes the light had been creeping steadily all about him. The trees on the hillside began to detach themselves one by one from the confused mass of their fellows. The far-off mountain peaks were growing darker, the color was faintly stealing back across the meadows, and already a hint of yellow light was stirring in the eastern sky.

The wind was growing chilly with the dawn.

"Wake up, Davenant!" Lawrence said; "you can't sleep here any longer, old fellow," bending over and touching the other's arm.

"Hollo, what's the row?" said Davenant, springing to his feet.

The other man laughed.

"You haven't caught cold, my boy?" laying his hand kindly on the lad's shoulder.

"Why, what did you wake me for?" Davenant asked, looking about him with a bewildered air. "Why, Lawrence, the morning hasn't come?"

And Lawrence, too, looked about him confidently.

"It will be morning soon," he said.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE OTHER SIDE.

THE next morning, at about eleven o'clock, Major Thayer's dragoman, Hassan, was quietly sitting in the entrance of the hotel, smoking a nargileh. He had not long since returned from the bazaar, whither he had accompanied his party, leaving them safely in the hands of "one very good guide," when a stress of im-

portant business absolutely necessitated his departure; and now, as he sat in the cool and quiet courtyard, puffing meditatively at his pipe, and from time to time consulting the rows of figures in his private account-book, a gentle satisfaction was slowly creeping over his anxious and weather-beaten countenance; he looked with benign indifference in the faces of the passers-by.

He might have been sitting in this way for perhaps a quarter of an hour, when a sudden and unaccustomed sound disturbed the dignified silence of the street, and a moment after a cumbersome travelling-carriage rolled slowly into sight. Hassan looked at it with some attention.

"It is Mahmoud the son of Abdallah, Mahmoud of Beyrout," he said to himself presently, as the equipage drew near enough for him to distinguish the features of the gaudily-dressed individual on the box beside the coachman; nor did the old man move or look up again as the horses drew up with a flourish before the hotel-door.

The new-comers were three in number — two ladies, and a tall, elderly man dressed in black with a white scarf about his hat, who got out first, accepting Mahmoud's proffered help with a certain awkwardness, and then waving him aside and turning slowly and stiffly to assist the ladies out. The first to descend was a small, active-looking woman, with short, high-kilted skirts, and a girl's hat pushed back from the faded, eager face.

"Dear me, Edwin, is this the hotel?" she demanded. "Why, I thought it was an old palace. I'm sure the guide-book says so. Dear me! And is this man smoking, the landlord? We want three rooms — front rooms — and a *salon* and — What, not the landlord? Where *is* the landlord, then?" turning sharply to Hassan.

"The man Mahmoud attends to that, my dear," the tall man in black remarked slowly.

And at the same moment the lady in the carriage looked around. "My dear Mrs. Gard, pray do not give yourself the trouble. Mahmoud will make all those

arrangements for me, and — oh, Mahmoud, *voulez-vous prenez* — the — ah, the basket, you know," pointing to a silken roll upon the seat before her. "My little pet is fast asleep still," patting the bundle with her plump and well-gloved hand.

But by this time the news of the arrival had spread all over the house; the turbaned landlord appeared, bowing in grave welcome, and half-a-dozen servants began taking out the various rugs, fur cloaks, and cushions with which the carriage was filled. The lady followed last of all, her short, fat person almost disappearing under the voluminous character of her wraps.

"You will inquire if Major Thayer is in the house, Mahmoud," she said, slipping her hand under Mrs. Gard's thin arm.

"Yes, my lady."

"And order tea."

"Yes, my lady."

"And — ah, yes — the basket. I cannot bear to have the poor darling out of my sight. I am sure that if he waked he would miss me," turning with a complacent smile to Mr. Gard.

"I was not aware," that gentleman began slowly, "I was not previously aware that the animals belonging to this species — "

"Beg your pardons, gentleman," said Hassan, rising gravely, "but I think you ask Major Thayer? The Major my gentleman."

"Ah," said the last comer, looking at him with some interest, "you are Major Thayer's dragoman, then. Very curious he should not find any thing more useful for you to do. Go at once and tell him I am waiting for him, if you please: Mrs. Van Ness — you will not forget the name."

She turned and mounted the stair, still leaning upon Mrs. Gard. The rooms which had been assigned to her were in the front of the house. "The best there are, I suppose?" she said, looking about her critically; "it does not make much difference for a day or two. I

shall not remain here longer. And — oh, very well, Mahmoud; put the basket down there, in the sun. Excuse me, Mrs. Gard, but if you would not mind moving — I am sure my little pet will enjoy that chair. And — Mahmoud!"

"My lady?"

"Go," said Mrs. Van Ness, sinking down upon the sofa, "go at once, *at once*, you understand — and find Major Thayer. And tell the man below I shall not need the carriage."

"Yes, my lady," said Mahmoud, bowing and shutting the door so respectfully and noiselessly behind him that Mrs. Van Ness could not repress an approving smile. "That poor creature quite worships me. I call it touching to see that kind of devotion in a common person," she observed languidly. There was a tacit war going on between Mrs. Gard and the dragoman. She looked up grimly now, setting her pale, coarse lips more firmly together. "I do not believe it," she said.

Meanwhile the subject of these remarks was passing with the utmost deliberation through the courtyard where Hassan was still smoking in the shade, and talking to the driver.

"Well?" said the latter, looking up with some anxiety.

"Oh, you had better wait," remarked the younger dragoman carelessly. "She may not use you, but she pays all the same." He turned to Hassan. "Your beautiful boy is well, God willing?" with a grave inclination of his supple and sumptuously-clad figure.

"My son," said the old man slowly, "is well; may God avert the omen! He will be better, O Mahmoud, when thy father hath repaid me for those stores."

There was a moment's silence.

"My father is an old man," said Mahmoud presently; "his beard is white."

"They were English stores," said Hassan slowly, "potted meats and pickles."

"The season has been bad."

"Forty bottles of pickles," said Hassan, looking at his pipe, "and the preserved meat of the howadji."

"My father will try the case with you, for know that there are law-courts in Beyrout, O Hassan."

"What!" said the old man, with a sneer, "has the cadi then ceased to be thine uncle?"

Mahmoud did not seem to have heard this remark. He drew an embroidered pouch from his belt, and began rolling a cigarette between his dexterous yellow fingers.

They smoked for several moments without speaking.

"Do your howadji stay here long?" he asked finally, a conciliating smile creeping over his insolent and servile face.

"God knows."

"My lady is a great American princess. The money flies from her hands like the sand before the wind. But God hath visited her with the curse of the Englishman: she cannot remain still. If," said Mahmoud suddenly, "thy howadji remain, she too will tarry in Damascus the blest; and if she tarries thou shalt be paid, O Hassan, thy just debt, yes, and something over."

Hassan looked up: "The debt in full?"

"By the beard of the prophet!"

The old man took off his fez and passed his hand through his venerable gray hair. "Mashallah. In the name of God, so be it!" he said solemnly.

It was nearly twelve o'clock when Constance returned from the bazaar. She went up to her room; the door was open, and Fanny was standing before the mirror, looking at herself with an expression of deep anxiety.

"Why, what's the matter, dear?" the girl asked, stopping in the doorway.

"Constance," said Mrs. Thayer, impressively, "Aunt Van has arrived."

"Aunt Van? When? Where is she? I'll go and see her."

"She has been here perhaps an hour," said Fanny mournfully; "and she has brought a clergyman and his

wife with her, my dear — people she picked up on the way, I suppose; and she has got a tame lizard in a basket; and she has made me pull this hat to pieces, and change my way of dressing my hair."

Constance laughed.

"Where is she? You make Aunt Van twice as unreasonable by being so afraid of her, Fanny. Now she never does those things to me. Poor old Auntie!"

"Poor old — Well!" with a resigned sigh, "she is waiting for you, you know." And then, as Constance still lingered in the doorway, "That dress becomes you; you are looking very well to-day," said Fanny thoughtfully. And indeed, within these last two days, the girl's large and noble beauty had seemed to awaken into new color and life, blossoming out like a rose that feels the stirring of the summer about its secret and folded leaves. There was a change in her face too — a look of dependence; something more childish and yielding in the expression of the proud-cut mouth. "A handsome girl," Fanny thought, looking after her critically; "a little larger than I like to see a woman though," with true American distrust of flesh and blood.

Mrs. Gard, too, looked curiously and attentively at Constance as she entered her aunt's room. Mrs. Van Ness had all the garrulity of a selfish woman, and it is probable that her present companion knew somewhat more about Miss Varley's private affairs than that young lady ever imagined. She came in now with rather a pleased look upon her face.

"Well, Aunt Van!"

Mrs. Van Ness was standing beside the window. She turned and embraced her niece with effusion, with a lingering pressure to her ample bosom, a soft rustle of silks, a faint scattering of familiar perfume on the air, which carried Constance back to the very earliest associations of her childhood.

"Ah," she said pressing her warm, plump hand heavily upon the girl's shoulder, "ah, my dear, I am so very glad you have come at last. It seems quite romantic

meeting you here. Fanny has told me every thing. I have a thousand things to ask you."

Here Mrs. Gard got up and left the room.

"You remember her, of course? The clergyman's wife at Bellevue. A good creature and perfectly devoted to me. She cannot bear the courier; and if you knew the trouble I have between the two! Why, they are both as jealous about me — It's quite touching, I assure you," said Mrs. Van Ness languidly. She sank back upon the sofa. "You have not told me what you think of my lizard, Constance."

Miss Varley turned and looked at the animal in question, who was sunning himself complacently upon a cushion on the floor.

"It seems so like home to see you with your pets, Aunt Van."

"He is such a romantic little darling, I could not live without him. I am quite devoted to him. Mahmoud got him for me this morning at Beyrout. He nearly bit Mr. Gard's finger off on the way down here; the poor, dear man is so clumsy."

"I don't remember Mr. Gard," said Constance.

"Why, the clergyman at Bellevue, my dear; the man who had sunstroke. You are looking very well yourself, Constance. Come here, and sit by me. Fanny has told me all about Mr. Stuart, you know," said Mrs. Van Ness suddenly. "I know old Mr. Stuart. My dear husband used to bank with him; and I congratulate you, my dear," patting her niece approvingly upon the shoulder.

"Aunt Van — "

"There, my dear, there. You need say nothing more about it. I understand," said the little lady on the sofa, with a gracious and patronizing air. "It is true that at one time I had other views for you, Constance; but taking every thing altogether — "

"This is really too absurd," said the girl, getting up impatiently and nearly knocking over the lizard. "My dear Aunt Van — "

"My dear Constance, there is not the slightest use in your arguing with me upon the subject. I will not for a moment imagine that my niece — my niece, I say — could have given any young man the encouragement you have given Mr. Stuart without — "

"I have never given Mr. Stuart the slightest encouragement."

"Without having considered all the consequences! A young woman of your age, Constance — "

"I 'm only one-and-twenty, Aunt Van."

"A young woman of one-and-twenty is a responsible person," said Mrs. Van Ness severely, while the lizard blinked approvingly from his cushion in the sun. And then, and with an increasing coldness of manner, she preceeded to ask her niece a few questions. Had Constance, then, absolutely no plans or intentions for the future? had she, then, no idea of the state of her father's affairs?

"What you are expecting or what you are waiting for I confess I am unable to understand. You are of age, and I might wash my hands of your affairs. I have not," said Mrs. Van Ness, pressing her perfumed handkerchief against her pale and glittering eyes, "I have not been accustomed to much confidence from you, Constance; but still, as your only near relative, as an old aunt who has always been kind to you, and proud of you, and — "

"Dear Aunt Van," said the girl, kneeling down quickly beside her and trying to take her hand.

"And when I think," went on the handkerchief, "that I used to imagine that — that you — cared for me — "

"You know," said Constance earnestly, "that I am not ungrateful."

"Ah — gratitude!"

"If there is any thing I can do to prove it — "

The handkerchief dropped.

"Then why won't you marry Mr. Stuart?" demanded its owner briskly, looking sharply at her niece.

The girl's face flushed. She made an effort to rise, but the jewelled fingers were laid upon her arm.

"Poor Jack!" she said bitterly. "I don't think he would thank you for this, Aunt Van. I don't care for him. If Fanny has told you every thing, perhaps she has not forgotten to tell you that. I don't love him; I — Good heavens!" she said suddenly, getting up to her feet, her proud lips beginning to tremble a little as she spoke, "am I to marry a man simply because he is a good match — because he has money? Other girls — I —"

"Other girls fall in love, Constance. I presume that is what you mean, although I must say I had not expected to hear this sort of objection from a practical and sensible young woman, like yourself," with a cutting little laugh. "However, so be it. We will consider it settled that you are waiting for some young man who you can — love. Excuse me, my dear; that is precisely what you have been saying. And therefore, as you will not marry, may I ask what you intend to do? You are not bad-looking," said Mrs. Van Ness calmly, "and I have heard that people consider you clever. As my niece you will always have a certain *entrée* into society, although I cannot imagine the use this privilege will be to you, living upon a secluded country farm in the society of a parcel of children and your step-mother. It is no affair of mine, my dear. You are old enough to decide these questions for yourself. No; excuse me, I am not angry. Mrs. Varley, *à perpétuité*, is perhaps hardly the companionship I should have chosen for you," said Mrs. Van Ness, shrugging her shoulders contemptuously; "but there is no accounting for tastes in this world. Be kind enough to ring the bell, Constance. My head aches," pressing two jewelled fingers languidly against her forehead; "I wish to order tea."

The girl put out her hand and complied with the request mechanically. There was something in the warm and over-perfumed atmosphere of the room, in the familiar tones of her aunt's voice, in the very look

of her cold blue eyes, which overpowered Constance with a feeling of mental lassitude and discouragement. All the hope and dream of the last few days seemed degraded and outraged by this chilling flood of common sense. Mrs. Van Ness had the faculty of a prosaic nature: she made beautiful things seem impossible.

"I shall not say any thing more about this matter," she went on now, with deliberation. "You are quite mistaken in supposing I have ever urged you to marry money. It is the commonest thing in the world," — pensively. "Look at Fanny Thayer; look at half the people you know. Mr. Lawrence — Fanny tells me he spent the evening with you yesterday."

"Yes," —in a low voice after a slight pause.

Mrs. Van Ness looked keenly at her niece.

"Mr. Lawrence is a case in point. I knew his wife, — a little, thin creature, with a pretty face, — a cousin of the Edward Poynter who married — But what was I saying? Ah, yes, about your friend Mr. Lawrence; *he* married his wife for money, notoriously. His own fortune had gone with the war. The Lawrences' fortunes are always going with something."

"I think," said Constance, suddenly bending over and looking at the lizard, — "I think that Mr. Lawrence was very fond of his wife."

"Has he told you so? Nonsense, my dear child. That is the difference between a man and a woman," said Mrs. Van Ness, meditatively; "the longer a man is married the more apt he is to be fond of his wife, while a woman — "

She passed her handkerchief across her lips.

"Hand me those salts, Constance. My dear husband used to say there were two important things in life, — religion and money, and plenty of both. The one is, I trust, within the reach of all of us," in a hasty voice; "but the other, the other, Constance," — laying her hand impressively upon the girl's arm, while the lizard, lifting up his white and skinny throat, seemed

watching her with grotesque malice from his sunny corner, — "the other — "

The door opened.

"Oh, Fanny may come in. Fanny knows all about it. We were speaking of Mr. Stuart, Fanny, my dear," said Mrs. Van Ness graciously, "and we should be glad to hear any thing — "

"Oh, I never speak on the subject, thank you. Constance can do me the justice to say *I* have never tried to force her confidence," said Mrs. Thayer, gloomily.

The new hat was less becoming; Tom had told her so, and she was deeply aggrieved.

"*I* am not capable of interfering with another person's comfort, or of saying that so-and-so is not becoming when — "

"Do you happen to know if the tea is passable in this hotel?" said Mrs. Van Ness, looking at her steadily. "I have ordered some tea."

For the last few minutes Constance had been standing by the window. She leaned forward now, a smile breaking over her face. Her eyes brightened.

"You have nothing more to say, Auntie? Tom is beckoning me," pausing an instant before shutting the door behind her.

Mrs. Van Ness and Fanny looked at each other without a word. The younger woman sprang up and hurried to the window.

"No, there is only Tom," she said in a puzzled voice, and as though answering a question. "Oh, and Jack; I see poor Jack, — and that Mr. Lawrence. Oh, Aunt Van!"

"Ah!" said Mrs. Van.

"You don't think Mr. Lawrence — "

"I wish you would be kind enough to ring that bell again, my dear."

Mrs. Thayer obeyed in mortified silence. But silence was not Fanny's strong point. "Constance is so peculiar," she began again. "Do you know, Aunt Van, I should really advise you — "

Can you imagine General Von Moltke listening to the critical suggestions of a young militiaman?

"I think, my dear," said the little old lady very distinctly, "that this is a matter which requires tact. Perhaps you had better leave it entirely to me, Fanny; it requires tact."

It had been a pleasant morning — for the lizard.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE BEGINNING OF THE END.

THEY were all standing in a group before the fountain, when Constance joined them. Lawrence noticed she was looking rather pale.

"Yes," said Davenant, lifting his hat automatically, "that is one of the strange things of experience, that it can be shared with dumb beings who evoke a thousand thoughts and fancies which endear them; just as there are certain people one may meet and live with and like, who yet remain outside of all the sentiments and feelings that have been quickened by a common life with them. Are you fond of animals, Miss Varley?"

"Davenant means that we are going to see the last of our horses. Hassan sends them off to Jerusalem tomorrow," said Jack.

"Hassan tells me he cannot get us a passage, and he is afraid we may have to wait here another ten days. Very provoking, but not his fault. He is dreadfully cut up about it though, poor old fellow. I suppose he is afraid we will think he has not managed well," said the Major in his good-natured fashion.

"The dragomen — my experience is doubtless limited — but the dragomen I have chanced to meet have by no means seemed to me to justify their reputation for extortion or double dealing. I find these Syrians a

simple and a childlike race of men," said Mr. Gard hesitatingly. He took off his hat and passed his hand with a weary indecision across his high and narrow forehead.

"Your head aches, Edwin. Let me — "

"No, my dear, no," impatiently. "My wife is perhaps unduly anxious since my accident; a very Martha, troubled about many things: but women are creatures of extremes, I observe," with an apologetic smile to the Major.

And through all this sound of voices the water dripped, the fig-leaves rustled in the sunlight. Overhead loose masses of cloud were drifting in slow procession across a blue and opaque sky.

"The summer is coming," said Constance, smiling as she met Lawrence's glance. She bent down and stroked Lione. "My dog has made friends with you already, I see," pulling the long, silken ears slowly through her fingers.

"I like dogs, you know."

"I remember," passing her hand more caressingly over Lione's head.

"I think these creatures should be kept in the stable," said Mrs. Gard.

"Ah," said Davenant mildly, "you don't believe in the transmigration of souls then, I suppose?"

Mrs. Gard turned sharply and looked at him, her faded face flushing a dull red. "Perhaps this gentleman is not aware — I am a clergyman's wife, Miss Varley," with a nervous, uncertain laugh.

"Oh, I am sure Miss Varley agrees with me," dreamily; "I really like this old Egyptian idea. It binds one so firmly to the whole mysterious sequence of life, and our attachments to animals grow to mean so much more than mere habit or association. Why, take a favorite dog: what is the impression he leaves upon you in his absence? One remembers a look, perhaps; for there is something in the glance of an animal which is like the glance of children, — a look from a world out of which we have grown and yet faintly remember."

"Oh, come now," said Stuart, in a soothing and conciliatory tone, "a horse is a horse, and a dog is a dog, my good fellow."

"And an appointment is an appointment," said the Major, taking out his watch.

The trusty Hassan was waiting for them in the doorway. They went out slowly, Constance and Mr. Lawrence passing out together, — together, but not talking to each other, as Stuart noticed with mingled irritation and relief. He remembered afterwards how through all the idle sauntering, the desultory chatter of that morning, there had been a singular persistence of observation in Lawrence's attitude, — a look which suggested a question piercing through all the careless quietude of his manner. Once, as they were standing for a moment side by side, "You are going away before long, I think you said," Stuart remarked abruptly.

The other man nodded.

"When?"

"I don't know. I never have plans."

"A precious queer way of travelling, that," said Jack impatiently.

The young fellow could hardly be civil. He was in a rage of jealousy and angry suspicion; and the worst of it was that nobody seemed to care, or be aware of it, but himself, and, perhaps, Mrs. Gard.

The eager-eyed little woman looked at him curiously once or twice as they crossed the square before the hotel, going over to see the horses.

It was a picturesque group they found there: a dozen horses; a little company of muleteers, fine, hardy Syrians, in all their bravery of silken scarfs and sashes and yellow slippers fresh from the bazaar.

"And so good-by to all the old days," said Stuart, looking at them regretfully. He colored a moment after, meeting Mrs. Gard's eye. The woman's notice embarrassed him. He turned to her husband.

The Major and Mr. Gard were discussing the politics of their country, standing with perturbed and absorbed

faces, their elderly backs turned upon the world at large, deep in the question of the new Army-Reductions Bill, "which, as a minister of the gospel, I cannot but approve," Mr. Gard was proclaiming sententiously.

The Major shook his gray old head.

"The country is going to the dogs, my dear sir."

"Let it. If it goes in the name of Christianity, that is all I ask, — in the name of Christianity."

"You are getting over-excited, Edwin dear."

"I say let it go. It can't do better. And I appeal to you as an army man to answer me frankly, 'Have you, or have you not, gone forth to meet these unfortunate Indian brethren of ours with outstretched hand —'"

"*That* I have," said the Major with a grin.

"With words of peace upon your lips —"

"Jack!"

Mr. Stuart turned his head.

"Shaitan is leaving, Jack. Won't you come and say good-by to the poor old fellow?" asked Constance in her clear, girlish voice.

He crossed over quickly to where she was standing.

"You had forgotten the dear old horse," she said reproachfully, — "the horse who brought me into Damascus," reaching up her hand to pat its glossy neck.

"That was only yesterday," answering the tone rather than the words.

"Only yesterday," she repeated softly, with a slow, irrepressible smile which hurt him as nothing else could have done.

He turned away sharply.

"You are ill," she said with a sudden change of manner, catching a glimpse of his pale, averted face.

"No."

The frank blue eyes watching him so kindly seemed to trouble him. He moved abruptly.

"You are not sorry that thing is over," he said brusquely, indicating with a nod the train of horses and attendants before them.

Constance hesitated.

"It has been quite perfect in its way. There are things — I shall never forget some of the days we spent together," the color deepening a little on her cheek.

Jack looked up eagerly.

"Nor I. Do you remember — " He wanted to ask, "Do you remember that day at Nablous?" but something stopped him. "Do you remember Esdraelon?" he said.

"And the night we were lost? You were so very kind to me that evening."

"And our meeting Ferris. It was a close shave that time, by Jove!" with an eager laugh.

Whatever jealous doubts had tormented him that day were forgotten now in the familiar delight of her presence.

He drew a long breath, looking about him with a sudden sense of pleasure. "One feels cramped and restless in the city. I could not sleep last night."

"Last night? I was awake too," said Constance, smiling.

"I meant to have asked you. I saw the light in your window. See here, Constance," a quick, pleased look coming into his handsome face. "I have an idea. Can't we have another ride together, just you and I? Say we go to-morrow; I can get the horses — "

"Not to-morrow. Mr. Lawrence has asked me to ride with him to-morrow," she said.

Perhaps it was just as well that Davenant interfered. He joined them now, his hat pushed back a little from his forehead, a look of quiet pleasure upon his mild and abstracted face.

"I have been looking at those horses," he said, coming up to where Constance was standing; "they are wonderfully like women — delicate, swift, proud, affectionate."

"Affectionate!" repeated Stuart.

"Oh, don't bear malice, Jack. I'm sure Shaitan was more surprised than yourself on the only occasion you ever came to grief together," carelessly.

"A horse is like any other good thing in this life," said Davenant; "you must be alone with him to know him. I don't boast much of my own riding," with frank simplicity; "but I think, after watching an Arab going over these Syrian hills at full speed, one gains quite a new revelation of the beauty of the old Centaur fable — the doubled existence; the keen animal enjoyment; the appeal to all the higher life of the senses, and dominion over Nature in her hidden places; the knowledge of the silent uplands under strange constellations, and secret sea-washed places of the world."

"Well, I don't know," said Lawrence doubtfully; "we have been long enough trying to get free from animal conditions. I hardly covet going back to them myself, not even to meet my ancestors."

He turned to Constance. "I think there is some plan for going to the jewellers' bazaar. You will come? Mrs. Gard is going," putting out his hand and touching the fan that hung from a ribbon at her waist. He opened and shut it slowly. "Is that the Japanese fan for which Davenant wrote those verses? It 's a good bit of color, you know, with that gray dress," looking at her with a smile. And presently there was a general move towards the bazaar. It was a delightful May morning, — a warm, breezy day, full of delicate sunshine and the flicker of young leaf-shadows on the ground; and the girl's happy glance wandered, full of a still content, from blossoming earth to sky, — that blue, stainless sky of summer she had never yet looked on with him by her side before. For it had been in winter, and in the bleak New England spring, that she had known Lawrence. Listening to him, walking by his side through this warm and caressing air, seemed a new and exquisite refinement of delight.

"Where were you a year ago to-day?" she asked him once, after a long silence.

"A year ago?"

"Last May. I was at home" — a vivid picture of the old place rising up before her. There was a certain

hill behind the house there, the highest point for miles around, overlooking a wide stretch of characterless landscape — a confused reach of low meadow-land and arid, rock-strewn pasturage and endless, straggling lines of weather-beaten fence. And there was a road winding up this hill; a sunken, sheltered lane where the small, brown tree-buds glistened first in the mild March afternoons, and the barberry bushes still kept a few scarlet clusters long after the first snow. Now, as she spoke, the vision of this place came back to her with the recollection of all the evenings she had waited there to see the sunset cast some brief interval of beauty about this joyless New England world. A hundred familiar memories came back to her — of short wintry afternoons, dying redly above a mute and snow-stricken country; of warm June nights, and long hours full of the ineffable melancholy of the spring, and with one thought, one longing, running through them all — and that a thought of Lawrence. For in those years that were past now — past — Denis Lawrence had grown to mean to her all the desirable, the precious, the ideal part of life. It said something for this man's sincerity of nature that even now, after all these years of idealization, and face to face with the disenchanting touch of reality, it seemed to this girl the one good thing in all her life to remember how she had loved him.

The silversmiths' bazaar was vast and cool and shadowy; a roofed enclosure divided into square, raised compartments by countless, narrow passage-ways; a place of dim light, and the glow of furnaces, and the sound of metal striking metal. They wandered on from one small platform to another. The outer sunshine streamed in through the small, narrow openings, high up between the lines of rude stone columns supporting the vaulted roof — streamed in on the crouching, and swaying, and prostrate forms of the workmen, white-clad and blurred, seen through the curling smoke, — the light catching here and there on some pale heap of wrought silver, some mass of glittering coin, or quaint,

mysterious amulet, graven with strange characters and set about with dull and curious stones.

Constance was looking at a collection of these charms against the evil eye when her sleeve slipped back a little, and the keen glance of the native workman caught the yellow gleam of amber about her wrist. He leaned forward — a tall, sinuous Arab, clad in dark-colored robes, his head bound about with fine white linen. He leaned forward, and looked and smiled.

"*Taïb?*"

He held out a small, fretted band of gold to Constance. "I don't understand," the girl said quickly.

"I think, as near as I can make it out, he wants to buy your beads," said Lawrence. "See, he is offering you that other bracelet in exchange. He says they are very good. Would you mind letting him look at them?" putting out his hand to take the string of amber.

He looked at it a moment before giving it back to her.

"You used to wear that when I first knew you," he said. "It suits you — that amber," slipping the smooth yellow balls through his fingers. "I remember breaking the clasp of this once."

"You had it mounted for me; I am superstitious about it," said Constance. "I have worn it such a long while now — as a charm."

Lawrence looked at it curiously.

"It is getting worn thin again. Let me take it; I can have it put in order for you," fingering the beads with a certain childish pleasure.

He was still holding them in his hand when Stuart came up with some message.

"I have been looking for you everywhere, Constance."

"I have been sitting here."

"Well, Mrs. Gard wants you. They are going to buy perfumes, and Hassan is waiting, and — You have lost your beads," his eye resting suddenly upon her bared white wrist.

"Mr. Lawrence has got them for me."

"Oh, Mr. Lawrence," repeated Jack slowly.

He was not a man to notice trifles. He was singularly free from whims and fancies. A man who prided himself, as a general rule, upon the cool and reliable quality of his common sense. And yet it required an effort now for him to keep his temper — an effort which made him clench his hand and brought the blood mantling to his face.

"Well, come when you are ready," he said, with an elaborate assumption of indifference, and addressing himself pointedly to Miss Varley. As much as possible he avoided looking at her companion.

"I am afraid poor Jack must be ill to-day," the girl said, glancing after him anxiously.

They went out into the street again and through the small, quiet square where the vendors of perfumes assemble — old men for the most part, and many of them Jews. They sat down on the carpet before a shop — a dingy array of shelves and dim glass bottles, and dry, glittering piles of gums and heavy lumps of incense. A wrinkled old man, with a long white beard and a curious fur cap upon his head, came out to take their orders. He served them reluctantly, with tremulous, yellow hands that shook as he held the precious drugs up against the light, gloating with old, covetous eyes over their thick and enervating odors.

When they left this place the air about them was heavy with escaping perfume, and for hours the faint scent clung to their hands and the folds of their hair and dress.

They went back into the main bazaar.

"I should like to have another look at that old mosque," said Mr. Gard.

They paused before it, watching the natives pass through the cloistered court or loiter about its delicate trickling fountain, or disappear into its cool and sombre depths.

"Dear me," said Mrs. Gard, with a sigh, "when one thinks that all this belonged to the Christians once! And now to see it in the hands of those nasty Arabs: people without a religion or — or —"

"Or morality," suggested Mr. Gard.

"Or any thing else," added his wife.

"Pardon me," said Davenant seriously; "but surely you forget their rugs?"

"Rugs!" repeated Mrs. Gard.

"Well, Persian carpets then, if you like the term better. When I think of what treasures there are in that building, what old and priceless fabrics from what remote and forgotten looms, and when I reflect that we are even debarred from entering in all humility to gaze upon this lost beauty, it justifies in my mind what I have always considered as one of the fatal mistakes of the middle age — I refer, of course, to the later crusades."

"Well, I never!" said Mrs. Gard blankly.

She looked round as though appealing to Stuart for sympathy, but Stuart was nowhere to be seen.

Meantime Mr. Lawrence was speaking to Constance about his proposed journey to Bagdad, — speaking of it rather as of a remote possibility, a plan of the past: "A plan I had undertaken half out of desire to find myself once more in the desert, because the fascination of vast horizons and great silence was still about me; and half perhaps — well, to get rid for awhile of my own personality. I have been growing restless here of late — dissatisfied. People don't understand," thrusting his stick into the ground impatiently.

"You are dissatisfied with your work, perhaps," said Constance doubtfully.

"My work!" he laughed. "It is kind of you to call it by any such name, Miss Varley. I'll tell you what I wish you would do, though. Come and see it. I've got rather a nice place here in old Ahmed's house. You remember the Armenian I pointed out to you yesterday?"

She nodded.

"Well, I'm staying in his house at present. A jolly old place. I wish you would come and see it. Come to-morrow with Mrs. Thayer."

"I will ask her," looking up at him eagerly.

They had come in sight of the hotel now. "I wonder

if Jack went home;" Constance suggested. It troubled her, in the midst of her own exceeding content, to think of Stuart's disappointment. She had never felt so inclined to friendliness towards him as now, when any thing but friendliness was impossible. All the generous impulse of her nature, — the deep tenderness born of a hopeless love, and going out with quick compassion to all futile and hopeless longing, — intensified and vitalized her sympathy, and gave her a feeling of comradeship with Stuart. As she said to herself simply, she was very sorry for Jack.

They came upon him quite unexpectedly now, standing beside the fountain, speaking to one of the men staying in the hotel. He looked up and nodded as they passed.

"You had better make up your mind to do it," his companion was saying. "You 'll find it decidedly pleasanter going there with a party, and the other men —" and a moment after Constance heard him laugh.

She had stopped at the foot of the staircase to say good-by to Lawrence.

"We shall see you this evening?" she asked.

"This evening?" he hesitated. "I have half an engagement. Yes, I will come," looking suddenly into her face. "I must make interest with Mrs. Van Ness," smiling. "I must get leave to take you out riding to-morrow."

He lifted his hat and walked quickly away. As he passed out of the door, Stuart turned and looked after him.

"I seem to know that man by sight," his companion observed carelessly. "Friend of yours, isn't he?"

"No," said Stuart.

He excused himself a moment later. "I must speak to that lady a minute," looking over to where Constance was standing with her hand on Lione's collar.

"All right," said the stranger, nodding good-naturedly. "You can always find me again if you make up your mind to join us. You had better come, I think."

Stuart waited until he had left the courtyard. He walked over deliberately to Constance. "I should like to speak to you," he said.

"To speak to me?" The girl looked up wonderingly. "Why, certainly, Jack. Is there any thing —"

"I should like to speak to you alone, if you will kindly step into the parlor with me. The place is quite empty at this time of day. I shall only detain you a moment."

There was something in his tone, or perhaps in the unusual formality of his manner, which touched the girl's pride to the quick. She dropped Lione's head, stood up, and looked the young man steadily in the face.

"As you like; I am quite ready," she said.

CHAPTER XXIII.

ANOTHER STEP.

AS Stuart had said, the drawing-room was empty: a large, vaulted room, built for coolness, with narrow, darkened windows, and a brimming marble basin into which a thread of glittering water fell back without ripple or sound. As in all Damascene houses, the room was divided in two parts by a raised platform covered with Persian carpets; but here — a concession to European luxury — a table and some chairs had been added to the furniture, and a couple of large ostrich eggs swung slowly before the doorway, suspended from the ceiling by a string.

A broad divan of leather made the circuit of the room against the wall. Constance crossed over and took her seat upon it, in the farthest corner. Her dog had followed her in, and came and laid down at her feet. She turned her head a little and glanced from under her eyelids at Stuart. She drew a long breath,

and pressed her gloved hands tightly together. She waited for him to begin.

His first words startled her.

"Did you happen to notice that man I was speaking to out there a moment ago?" indicating the courtyard with a nod.

She looked up.

"I saw nothing especial about him."

"No," with a short laugh, "only I was not sure that you had noticed him. I'm going away with him. I'm going to Baalbeck to-morrow."

Constance said nothing.

"You don't ask me why I am going?"

"I suppose you want to see Baalbeck," she answered, looking straight before her. She would have given something just then to avoid further explanation.

"Oh, that's it, of course," the young man said defiantly.

He stood where he was for several minutes, his hands in his pockets, his eyes fixed upon the ground. Through the silence he could hear her light, hurried breathing; a bee flew in at the open doorway and dashed itself audibly against the window-pane.

"Constance!"

His whole manner had changed to one of utmost gentleness. He sat down on the divan beside her, and laid his hand very quietly upon hers.

"Do you think I am going away on your account?" he said.

She did not move her hand. She looked at him without speaking. Her face was quite pale.

"I think," said Stuart, after a moment's silence, "I think it would be well for us to understand each other better. I think —" he drew himself back abruptly. "You have believed that I was jealous to-day."

She moved uneasily at that.

"You ask me — questions —"

"I was jealous; you are right," said Stuart quietly.

He waited a moment, trying to collect the words.

"I said we ought to understand each other better," looking at her gravely. "Until we came here I thought, I believed, there was a — a chance of your caring for me in time. I should not tell you this now if it did not explain — I 'm not very good at explanations," with a faint smile, his face flushing red.

There was no answer.

"Until we came here," the young man went on more rapidly, "I had always that hope before me. I thought that in time — I have never cared for any one as I have cared for you. It seems to me now that I must have loved you from the first day I ever saw you. I don't go in much for being clever myself — not like those other fellows — but I know enough to see the difference. I could admire you. To be sure I couldn't tell it to you in German, like Lawrence."

She looked up quickly, but he did not give her time to speak.

"I suppose you think that all this doesn't make much difference; that I tried to get up a flirtation with you because you were the only girl around; and the consequences serve me right. Fanny told me as much as that once on her own account. I didn't take the trouble to deny it to her, but I *should* like to have you know" — his voice grew suddenly husky; he passed his hand impatiently across his lips — "I should like to have you believe that I loved you as well as any man can love. That 's what I wanted to say to you. I gave you every thing," getting up and walking hastily to the door.

He stood there for a minute or two, staring out at the blinding sunshine.

Miss Varley had not moved. There was a brass plate lying on the table before her. When he began speaking, her eyes had fastened upon this unconsciously. She sat mechanically tracing the arabesques graven upon it with her finger, with the dull persistence of a fever-dream, with a sickening realization of the cruelty of her silence deepening with every moment that passed.

He came back and stood before her.

"There 's not much more to be said now between us. You 've been very honest with me. I — I never blamed you. You will be glad to remember that, only — Look here, Constance," he said, with sudden passion, and stooped and took both her unresisting hands in his, "don't think I want to worry you. Lots of fellows have had this kind of trouble; I suppose I can bear it as well as they. But there is one thing I want to ask you — "

"Yes, Jack."

"You do care for me a little, I know; or, stop! I don't mean that; but you like me? You won't mind saying that; you like me?"

"Yes," the tears gathering slowly in her eyes.

"Then" — he drew a long breath — "isn't there any thing I can do, any thing? I 'm not a man to say what I don't mean; you know me well enough for that: but if there was any thing about myself that I could do or change," watching her face intently, "I 'd wait any length of time."

I think what hurt her the most in this speech was the sense of its utter uselessness. The simple loyalty of this girl's nature was too deeply ingrained, too much a part of all her daily self, to leave room for hesitation, much less doubt. But her imagination was touched by the piteous hopelessness of his appeal. She lifted her eyes a moment and then looked steadily away, her face growing white and rigid and expressionless. She was accustomed to be very honest with herself. Deep down — below all the passion of pity, the natural womanly emotion of the hour — she was aware that nothing stirred responsive to his voice; that she did not really suffer; that that inmost self which thrilled with infinite tenderness at Lawrence's most careless word was dumb here — dumb and apathetic. All the innate honesty of her nature held her wordless.

"If there is any thing that I could change," he said.

She repeated the words to herself blindly, trying to realize their significance to him as a man might wrench

a paralyzed limb to prove to himself its vitality. It was of no use. Even the knowledge of his daily, hourly care for her, the unswerving preoccupation with her — with her who had not even an honest impulse of liking to give in return — even this could not make her feel.

She put up her gloved hand to her lips; there was a faint perfume clinging to it still of which she was distinctly conscious. She tried to speak, and the horrible silence lengthened between them; and she knew, without looking, what expression of desperate hope was dawning in the eyes fastened upon her face.

"If you tell me to stay," he said, "nothing more than that — I can wait," with a curious catching of his breath.

"Jack!"

"I can wait," getting up to his feet with sudden, uncontrollable excitement. "I won't trouble you, don't fear. You are not bound to any thing. But I think you'll understand some day. I'm not afraid to leave my life in your hands," with a nervous laugh.

She looked up without speaking, and something in her face checked him in his triumph abruptly.

He hesitated; his hands pressed hard upon the table which stood between them. The room was very still; the fountain glittered silently in the sunshine; now and then a warmer gust of air came blowing in at the open door. The bee was still beating its life out hopelessly against the window; there were footsteps crossing the courtyard; Lione lifted up his head from between his paws and listened with ears erect. "Sometimes I think it would be a relief to you if I went away," said Stuart slowly.

"A *relief?*"

If this were only the story of Constance Varley, I think it would have finished here. I believe that in that moment she resisted one of the greatest possible temptations to insincerity — the impulse to put an end, at any cost, to all this misery; for perhaps the most betraying form of insincerity consists in this conscious self-abandonment to temporary high-pitched impulse.

Her lips trembled and turned pale; he could see her eyes glistening in the half-darkness; she had never seemed so beautiful to him, so desirable, as now.

"I think you had better go, dear Jack," she said.

The footsteps in the court drew nearer. Lione scrambled to his feet, and shook himself and growled. It was Mr. Gard who entered; he came in with his hat in his hand, with a deep-drawn sigh of content. "For the sun is growing intolerably hot, I assure you. You young people have shown your discretion in selecting this shady place."

No one answered for a moment. He looked at them both, not curiously, but with a slow and mild surprise.

"I am not interrupting you, I hope?"

"I was only explaining my future plans to Miss Varley. I think of going away to-morrow, Mr. Gard. To Baalbeck."

"But not for a lengthened period, I presume?"

He looked at Constance before answering. "I do not know," he said.

Mr. Gard had seated himself on a chair beside the table.

"I find it difficult to use those lounges," with a grave smile at the divan. "I see you prefer them, Miss Varley. And what is this — a recent purchase, perhaps?" taking up one of the brass plates from the table.

"No," said Constance.

"I thought you might have been making purchases in the bazaar. They have certainly a peculiar interest of their own, these brazen vessels, being, one can imagine, fashioned much in the same way as the brazen censers of the rebellious children of Israel. Have you any idea of the probable antiquity of these?" turning the platter curiously between his long, thin hands.

"I don't know any thing about those things," said Jack.

"Ah, you are not an antiquarian, I see, like your friend Mr. Lawrence. A very interesting young man, I

found him. We had some slight conversation together this morning; I thought him remarkably well informed."

"I believe that he and Davenant know all about old carpets and old cracked teacups and that sort of thing. I don't go in for that kind of information myself."

"I confess I am somewhat of the same frame of mind," said Mr. Gard slowly; "my opportunities for acquiring such tastes have been few," speaking with a certain regret. "In my time this diversity of pursuits was hardly expected from a young man. We were educated on a somewhat severer method; but it paid, sir, it paid. We worked in those days," his voice growing rapid and thin. "We tried without ceasing. There's a new set of men come in since then, Mr. Stuart. They say we lack scientific training and all that. Maybe it's true. I don't deny it. But it seems hard to hear, when a man has worked on through poverty all his life, doing his duty by the light that was given him. I am not an old man, sir; there is work in me yet," holding up his hand with an unsteady laugh.

"Edwin!" Mrs. Gard had come in without their hearing her.

She went and stood beside her husband's chair, chafing his hand between her own roughened fingers. "Is your head getting bad again, dear? I thought I heard your voice," turning distrustfully and with a certain defiant anguish from Miss Varley to Stuart.

Mr. Gard looked at his wife doubtfully, with an excited, reddened face. "I — I was only speaking to Mr. Stuart, Mary," pressing his other hand wearily to his forehead.

"Yes, dear."

"The sun would give any one a headache to-day," said Constance gently.

"Don't you think you had better come with me and lie down a little while, Edwin?"

He rose irresolutely. "I — I am very well where I am. Let me pick up my own hat, Mary. I desire you

not to do those things for me," with a nervous twitching of his careworn, irritable mouth.

"Very well, dear."

She looked back anxiously at the other two from the doorway; a grotesque little woman, ill-dressed and fussy and commonplace, but with something about her which brought the tears to the girl's eyes. "I believe — I believe that is as good a woman as ever lived. I admire her, I respect her," she said with sudden passion.

"What, Mrs. Gard?" asked Stuart, doubtfully.

He had hardly noticed the scene which had taken place before him. The old man had got a little excited — there was nothing so wonderful in that. In a certain way I think he was even grateful for the interruption. It had steadied his nerves. He was an obstinate fellow in his own way, Stuart. When he had looked at a thing long enough it never seemed so impossible. And back once more on the ordinary level of life he felt surer of himself. He was determined to profit by every opportunity.

"I believe," he said now with more firmness, "that it is Lawrence and Lawrence alone who is standing between us. Stop a moment, Constance" — as the girl made some sign of dissent — "hear me out. You can safely leave me this much hope, I think. It won't make much difference to you, and to me — it would be something to remember," with a sudden quiver in his voice. He took her gloved hands in his, and held them tightly for a moment. "If ever I know that he — that you are not together, I shall believe that there is still a chance for me, that's all." He dropped her hands and turned away, and then came back and stood before her silently.

"I think you will find that I don't forget, Constance."

He left her without another word.

CHAPTER XXIV.

IN WHICH MR. LAWRENCE READS MÉRIMÉE.

LAWRENCE had gone directly home. A group of models were waiting before the door of his studio: he had been at some pains to induce these men to pose to him, but now he sent them away with hardly a moment's hesitation; he wished to be alone. Like all naturally undemonstrative men gifted with quick and mobile sympathies, the continued presence of a crowd of people fatigued his nerves, and ended by throwing him into a state of lassitude and profound melancholy. Now, as he opened the door, the cool silence of his room gave him a sensation of positive pleasure. He looked about him; every thing was as he had left it the day before; the window was still open, the same locust was chirping from time to time among the fig-leaves — the only sound, except the rustling of some loose papers the wind had scattered on the floor.

He picked up one of these papers as he entered; it was a letter from his sister. "I must answer this," he thought, and tossed it over on the writing-table, and threw himself down on his divan.

The hot glare of the streets seemed still before him, in confused impressions of color and movement and light. He pressed his hand before his eyes; there was another face, a soft and harmonious personality which seemed to belong more fitly to this moment of satisfaction and repose. There was a sense of radiant self-reliance about Constance which was infinitely attractive to him. He thought of her now with a look of pleased recollection on his face. He had found in her that most fascinating of qualities — an idealized reflection of himself. "She is just about where *I* was two or

three years ago," he thought. He was charmed by the way in which they understood each other; being with her was like breathing once more in the fresh moral atmosphere of his own youth; when he listened to her he found again the expression of his own old dreams and desires, untouched, as yet — very eager, and unwearied of life. What had attracted him was shown to him again, but clad with a new expression, and instinct to him with a new sense of beauty and fleetness and loss; but he no more imagined that he had a part in bringing this about than he held himself responsible for her love of animals or her taste in dress.

There had been two or three trifling incidents in their morning's experience together which came back now with irritating accuracy. That anxiety about Stuart, for instance. How was it reconcilable with — with —

"Why, I might as well be Davenant, and be done with it," he said aloud with sudden impatience. He got up hastily, crossed the room, and sat down before his writing-desk, with the gesture of a man who has come to some decision. He glanced over his sister's letter, took a piece of paper, and began to write.

"DAMASCUS: May, 187 —

"MY DEAR KATE,

"I start for Bagdad to-morrow. I have not the slightest idea how long — "

He threw the pen down with some muttered, impatient exclamation of disgust. Going to Bagdad? The plan was an absurdity. Why, there were lots of things to do in Damascus. These people, whose presence had disturbed him, would be gone in a week at the farthest, and there would be nothing more to interrupt his work.

"They would be gone," — with a feeling of the same sudden and inexplicable irritation.

He took up his pen again and fell to drawing designs on the paper cover of the nearest book. It happened to be a volume of Mérimée's "Letters."

Lawrence had long ago passed that stage of literary

development which exalts into genius the jaded and careful *ennui* of this elaborate, this misanthropic Parisian; but the book had the charm of old association for him. He opened it now at random; he opened it at a passage in which Mérimée alludes to his first visit to Italy: —

"When I left Paris I felt myself on the verge of a great passion," he says; "but I reflected upon all it would cost her, and it seemed to me that such love as I had to offer could never requite her sacrifice. I left Paris, and she has never known the truth. *Elle n'en sut jamais rien.*"

The words made an impression upon him. There was something in the idea which appealed to all the refining, and perhaps a little fantastic chivalry of his nature. "*Elle n'en sut jamais rien.*" There was a delicacy of sentiment, a subtle generosity, about the feeling which touched his imagination with a foreshadowing of silent and tender regret. After all, it was only a different version of his resolve of the night before. It was Constance who should decide the situation; but would she? It was with an inexplicable restlessness and impatience he waited for that answer to come.

He was still sitting before his desk, looking vacantly out at the narrow strip of sky above the barrier of broad fig-leaves, spreading green and fan-like in the windless afternoon, when some one knocked at the studio door.

"Come in!"

It was Ahmed, the Armenian, who entered. He came forward slowly, with measured steps.

"The long-expected are here, O Howadji."

"The deuce they are!" said Lawrence. He got up hastily. "When do you start?"

Ahmed stroked his beard gravely. It might be to-morrow night. Allah was great; it might not be till after to-morrow. If the howadji still intended going — with a penetrating look from his keen old eyes — it was necessary to be ready at any moment.

"The desert is wide, howadji."

"The feet of thy camels are swift, O Ahmed," the young man answered absently.

He looked down at the open book before him: "*Elle n'en sut jamais rien.*"

"I am going to the hotel again to-night," he added slowly. "I am going to see some friends there. When I return you shall have my answer. You shall have my answer before I sleep, O Ahmed."

"Mashallah! So be it, in the name of God," the old man said.

He left the room with the same leisurely dignity of gesture, and Lawrence was once more alone.

The afternoon light was failing rapidly; there was a grayish tinge now creeping over the fig-trees; the sky, seen through them, had grown cooler in tint, and the life of the city had awakened. He could catch a murmur of voices, the sound of far-off laughter, and the dull thrumming of a native drum marking the cadence of a song.

The noise came from that café by the river to which he had taken Constance. He would go there now, he thought; and took up his hat and threw it down irresolutely. Some bits of old leather and stuff were hanging on the walls; he unfastened two or three of these and folded them together, and tossed them back in a heap upon the floor. It was useless beginning his preparations for departure yet.

But Davenant, coming in at that moment, was struck at once by signs of displacement and change.

"Hollo," he said, staring round him, "why, what have you been doing? You 're not going away, Lawrence?" He sat down on the divan and pushed his hat off his forehead. "How long is it since you have been at the hotel?"

"Not since morning," carelessly. "Have a cigar, Claude?"

"Ah, then you can know nothing about it. Thanks, no; I won't smoke."

"Know nothing about what? Has — has any thing happened at the hotel?"

"Well, I 've been making rather a fool of myself, I think," said Davenant mildly. He looked around the room again, and then up at the ceiling. "I say, Lawrence, have you got any money to spare?"

Denis nodded.

"Plenty. How much do you want?" getting up and going over to his trunk.

"I 'm really very much obliged to you, old fellow."

"Oh, that 's all right. You startled me, though," taking up a cigar and lighting it; "I thought something might have happened to — to the hotel."

"I can return it to you next month," said Davenant earnestly. "I meant to have sailed for home directly if you could not let me have it: third class."

Lawrence went on smoking in silence a few minutes.

"I won't preach; but don't get into worse scrapes than you can get out of," he began doubtfully.

"Oh," said Davenant, "you couldn't have helped doing the same thing yourself. I never saw one like it; five hundred years old at the least, and in almost perfect preservation —"

"*What?*" said Lawrence, laying down his cigar.

"Five hundred at least. You never saw any thing more exquisite. I happened to be just in time to save it. Mrs. Van Ness — you 've seen her — Miss Varley's aunt?"

"Well?"

"She was going to buy it and have the work transferred to some new piece of stuff, — absolutely new, modern stuff; fancy that!"

Lawrence laughed.

"If you would not mind telling me what it was, to begin with, Davenant —"

"Well," said Davenant, reflectively, "I should call it an inspiration — a poem in color. I can't describe it; but imagine a piece of frail, blue-gray silk, thin and silvery, and worn and very old, and all inwrought with

strange beasts and growing plants; great blossoms in flat, bright tints, intermingled with fantastic animal forms, — a splendid and indeterminate life. And, scattered all through it, binding the work together, a rain of sweet and curious flowers, — flowers delicate and precise in form, and of faint color. And Mrs. Van Ness was going to transfer it! Upon my word," said the young man earnestly, "she made me feel quite ill."

Lawrence laughed again.

"You haven't seen Ferris lately?"

"He was round at the consul's this morning, getting letters. I asked him to come to the hotel, but he said he wouldn't. Ferris doesn't care much for women, I think."

"Ferris," said Lawrence slowly, "is one of the best fellows alive. I had some letters this morning too," looking over at his table. "One from my sister. They are both married now, my sisters. I wish some one would found a society for the selection of brothers-in-law."

"I don't object to mine particularly," said Davenant; "to be sure I don't see much of him. Their house is pure Elizabethan, and they have furnished it with Louis Quinze chairs — those gilt things with legs, don't you know. I'm sorry, for I was very fond of my sister."

"But when it's a question between furniture and family affection —" said Lawrence, with quiet amusement.

"Oh, of course. Still, I do go down there every autumn for a few days, to shoot. Last year I shot the dog," he added mildly.

They stayed there talking until the room had grown quite dark, and then went out to dine together. Lawrence looked back as he was closing the door.

"Forgotten any thing?" asked his companion, pausing on the stairway.

"Nothing." The heavy door swung to behind them with a crash.

"I shall know all about it," thought Denis, "before I open that door again."

He ran lightly down the steps and linked his arm in Davenant's. "Come on and find Ferris. Who knows when we three shall dine together again?" he said gaily. But even Ferris noticed that he was not like himself that night.

The hotel parlor seemed already full of people and lights when they entered it. There was quite a crowd about Mrs. Van Ness; the floor in front of her was strewn with old rugs and stuffs and porcelains and arms; and an almond-eyed Syrian and a wrinkled old Jew were kneeling on the platform, placidly unfolding yet more of the precious things of the East.

"Ah, Mr. Lawrence"— she looked up graciously, holding up a fat and jewelled hand— "you are the very person I wanted to see; your fine artistic taste, you know. And isn't this too enchanting; quite romantic — all these beautiful embroideries and things?"

"Have you been getting many of them?" said Lawrence.

The old Jew had looked up with grave alarm at the young man's appearance, and had begun hurriedly rolling some silken stuff together.

"I know that old fellow— the greatest old cheat in Damascus," Denis commented carelessly.

"Oh," said Mrs. Van Ness, "but my dragoman, Mahmoud, sent for him for me as a special favor; he always sends his assistant to sell his things unless to persons of very great consequence. Such a romantic idea! I really think you must be mistaken, Mr. Lawrence, for Mahmoud is perfectly devoted to me. He never would allow any thing of that kind, I assure you."

"I see," said Lawrence shortly.

Miss Varley had looked up and bowed gravely as he came in. She was sitting a little away from the others, and nearer the window, working. Half the length of the room was between them, and he was conscious of

her slightest movement. He was still standing by Mrs. Van Ness, looking down at a piece of linen she was showing him; but he knew when Stuart went over to speak to the girl.

"Oh, Persian, I should say; Persian decidedly," he said aloud.

He could have given no name to this vague and potent feeling which was gradually taking possession of all his being; he did not wish to name it. Only he was conscious of some subtle and uneasy delight which seemed to creep between him and the outer world. It is, perhaps, with some such unresisting pleasure that the trees in the orchards feel the rose-white promise of their blossoms burst from the barren branches at the warm, compelling touch of spring.

He had, in reality, been but a very few minutes in the room before he went over to where Constance was sitting. He stood leaning against the wall, his hand on the back of a chair, looking down at her moving fingers. It was a work belonging to Mrs. Van Ness over which the girl was busy, but he could not know this, and something in her constrained attitude and bent head annoyed him. He was a man full of fancies. There seemed to him something ominous in her silence to-night.

The swift, white fingers trembled a little as he watched them. She looked up.

"You have seen Mr. Stuart?"

"Not to speak to."

"I think he was looking for you," said Constance. She bent her face over her work. "Jack is going away to-morrow," turning to him naturally, with a sudden passionate craving for understanding and sympathy.

He did not answer. She glanced at him again a moment later, thinking he had not heard. He was looking out at the moonlight in the courtyard with the expression of a man whose thoughts were miles away. Her eyes fell again with a feeling of baffled expectation. She had thought all day of this moment, and now it

seemed that he did not care to speak or listen. She kept her eyes fixed upon the sewing. "You are industrious to-night," said Fanny, passing. Constance had lost all that fine color; she was looking quite pale and insignificant, Mrs. Thayer thought.

"Mr. Lawrence!"

Mrs. Van Ness had crossed the room slowly, with a rustle of silk and a dropping of shawls and a scattering of faint perfume on the air. "I want to speak to you; and you have not seen my lizard," she said. The young man followed her reluctantly to a sofa beside the door.

"Sit down;" she pushed away some pillows, and made a place for him by her side. "I really have a great many things to talk to you about. My lizard is upstairs. He has bitten Mr. Gard twice already," with languid amusement; "but some people are so clumsy, you know. He is the most affectionate little creature in reality—"

"Mr. Gard is?"

Mrs. Van Ness laughed. "Poor Mr. Gard. He is our old clergyman, you know. At least my dear husband used to go and hear him; I never went to that church. And *entre nous*, you know," tapping Lawrence's arm confidentially, "the poor old man is really quite—" she shrugged her shoulders significantly. "He has been *passé de mode* for years; an excellent man, but such a very dull preacher, and so shockingly poor! He had sunstroke last year, and his wife says that is the reason he resigned his parish; but the fact is," looking cautiously about her, and lowering her voice mysteriously, "they would have got rid of him any way—I know it. They had found a younger man to take his place, and really a young clergyman is so much more popular, you know. My dear husband always said it would make a difference of fifty per cent. in the pew rents when Mr. Gard was gone."

"Pleasant for him, poor devil!" said Lawrence compassionately.

"Oh, you are a Roman Catholic, Mr. Lawrence; you don't understand these things. His old congregation behaved quite handsomely, you know; they gave him a silver teapot with an inscription. To be sure, he could not live on that," with a deprecating smile. "He had got some employment as a book-agent, when I brought him and his wife abroad. I 'm very fond of helping people; I like gratitude," folding her luxurious drapery about herself complacently.

"Gratitude?" repeated Lawrence absently, "that presupposes a most generous nature. My mother used to be fond of poor people—"

"I knew your mother; a beautiful girl she was, and very shy. I met her once at a reception at Judge Poynter's—the Member of Congress, I mean."

"I know," said Lawrence.

"Ah, of course," with a recollecting smile, "of course. He 's a connection of yours, I remember, by marriage. Well, what was I saying? ah, yes. Your mother. I wanted to bring her out a little; I tried to give her a dinner; but there was something the matter with you—you had some ridiculous cold or other—and she would not come. Your father came without her. You are not like your father," turning to look at the young man with a critical glance.

"I remember your wife too," she said a moment after, "a little— Hm!" calling herself to order abruptly. "I remember everybody, you see, Mr. Lawrence."

But Lawrence was silent. There was something which troubled him in this sudden evoking of dead faces out of the past at this moment, and when he most desired to hold his life, plastic and unshackled, in his grasp.

"You must come and dine with me when we all get back to New York again. You are going back soon, I suppose?"

"I?" said Denis, looking up with a start; "how can I tell?"

"I 'll give you a dinner if you will let me know when you arrive," said Mrs. Van Ness blandly. "A little

dinner. I have never had more than eight people at once at my table since my dear husband died. Eight has been my limit," laying her hand impressively upon the young man's arm. "Eight, ever since."

Mrs. Thayer had been watching this long conference with some uneasiness. She passed them now; looked out at the clear, moonlit sky for a minute. "Jack will have a lovely day for starting to-morrow," she said.

"Is Mr. Stuart going?" asked Davenant. He began to speak of his own departure. "I feel like a man who has been on a spree," he said; "this sumptuous life of the East, this splendid use of color and material, has given me an excess of sensation. These rugs and scarfs, and all this wrought metal and worked linen and incense, amongst which these placid Orientals bask — as unconscious of its significance as the insect of the color of its glittering wings — excite me still; but they no longer satisfy me; and I turn back instinctively to that Europe over which arose those two stars of the material and the spiritual life — the Venus of the Greeks and the Virgin of the Italians."

"Dear me. *Do* you suppose he means the Virgin Mary?" asked Mrs. Gard in a horrified whisper to Constance.

"Yes," said Davenant, turning to her in all simplicity, "that is what I mean. The worship of Venus is homage to the supreme beauty in woman; the worship of the Virgin is homage to her most sacred form of suffering — the two ideas which form and resume all the world of art and literature, and without which our life would be that of the Oriental — a sumptuous and wordless and sterile thing."

"Oh," said the old Major, with his dry smile, "you forget

> A Persian's heaven is easily made, —
> 'Tis but black eyes and lemonade.

A rare old song we used to think that, in the days when I was young. You boys don't read Tom Moore."

"I should hope not, indeed," said Fanny, with a toss of her head. She had no particular opinion about Moore, but any allusion to the Major's youth inspired her with a vague feeling of resentment.

Where Fanny was, the conversation was apt to grow personal. In a few minutes they were all discussing the details of a recent social scandal, with whose principal actors they were all more or less acquainted. "And I must say I should like to know what made her do it," Fanny concluded candidly; "and unfortunately that is the one point one can never hope to understand."

"I think I can understand it," said Constance quietly. She hesitated and looked out at the splashing fountain in the moonlight. "There are some appeals a man has no right to make," she said with sudden passion.

Mr. Lawrence looked up quickly. "You would have had him keep silence then?"

"If I had been in his place," said Constance proudly, "I would have kept silent though I had died."

They went out into the courtyard together. It was a pale, blue-gray night. There was not a breath of wind stirring; the very shadows thrown by the young moon were motionless and half transparent; and the moon itself was reflected, a thin and yellow disc, in the smooth surface of the brimming pool.

Lawrence lingered a little behind the others. "I want to speak to you a moment," he said, and stood there irresolute, dipping his fingers in the tepid water, and breaking the placid reflection into wide gleaming circles of light. A mad impulse to tell her every thing was on him, and still his lips were sealed by what he believed to have been her instinctive protest against listening to his speech. "I want to ask you —" he began again and hesitated.

"Yes?"

The branches stirring a little overhead, the moonlight shone down full upon the pure and sensitive face — a child's face it seemed to him, and troubled with a child's dim apprehension of pain.

One moment he stood irresolute. Then he looked up quietly. "I have told your aunt I was coming for you to-morrow. You will like the horse I have got for you, Miss Varley — a very spirited creature; but he has been ridden by a lady before." His tone was the same that he would have used to a mere acquaintance. And yet, as he turned by the doorway to bid her good-night, there was something in his manner which made her put out her hand involuntarily, and speak.

"There is something the matter, Mr. Lawrence. I — I have been wanting to ask you all the evening." She pressed her hands together nervously. "You are in trouble, or something has happened since I saw you this morning. You have been doing something — "

"I," said Lawrence, looking at her steadily, "I have been reading Mérimée." He took her hand in his, and held it for a moment. "Good-by," he said slowly.

"Good-by."

He looked up smiling. "You mean it is only good-night?"

CHAPTER XXV.

ANOTHER LIFE.

CONSTANCE was in her own room the next morning, when Mrs. Gard knocked at the door.

"Come in!" The girl started up, surprised at the unexpected face of her visitor. "I thought it might be Fanny," she said half apologetically; and then, with instinctive hospitality, hastened to make the new-comer comfortable, pushing the one easy-chair nearer the window, which stood wide-open this mild spring morning. There were some books and a half-finished letter lying upon the table, but she had been sitting before them with folded hands, she did not herself know how long.

"I hope that Mr. Gard is better this morning — has got over his headache?" she said presently, seeing that her guest showed no disposition to speak.

Mrs. Gard looked up quickly. "I wanted to tell you about that. He — my husband — he is not well; the least thing excites him, and for strangers, who do not know — "

"But I do know," said Constance, with a ready wish to spare her the pain of telling; "my aunt has told me."

The little woman opposite looked up with eager eyes. "She has told you?" leaning forward a little and catching at her breath.

Miss Varley glanced about her uneasily. "I heard that Mr. Gard had had sunstroke," she said gently. "I was very sorry to hear it."

"Yes!"

"And that — that he had given up his parish. It must have been a great sorrow to you," looking up with grave compassion.

She moved her hand impatiently, as though putting herself out of the question. "And she told you nothing else about him, then? Nothing about the reason of his leaving?"

Miss Varley looked at her bewildered.

"She said he had sunstroke, and never told you how or why, and you never thought to ask her, or she answered you as she did that Mr. Lawrence last night. They thought I did not hear them talking of Edwin. A dull old man, they called him, and shockingly poor; and the parish — the parish would have got rid of him any way. Our own parish, Miss Varley," clasping her thin, rough hands together, and looking down at them with a certain bewildered incredulity. "And she said she knew it; that they had come to her — for advice."

"I am sure," said Constance, hesitating, "I am sure that my aunt meant nothing unkind. And I know that Mr. Lawrence — If you will tell me what you would like him to know, I promise you that he shall hear it to-day," lifting up her blue eyes frankly.

Mrs. Gard did not seem to notice the offer.

"Our own parish," she repeated vacantly. "Why, Miss Varley, we went there when we were first married, Edwin and I; and we made it our home. It was a poor enough place until Edwin came, just a small country church; and he started every thing — the evening service for the mill-hands, and the Sunday-school, and the Wednesday prayer-meetings; he never missed one of them in twenty years, summer or winter, until last year. There wasn't another minister in all the country round who could say as much," with a sharp nod, "not one. And to call him a dull preacher! Why, we have had people visiting us — people from Boston, who had heard every thing — and they said they had never listened to better sermons than my Edwin's," a dull look of pleasure creeping over her strained and anxious face.

Perhaps it was some relief to her to say these things to Constance. People had a way of coming to the girl with stories which demanded sympathy; she never failed to meet them, whatever trouble she might have of her own thrust out of sight and speechless; and in all things she had found it easier to give than ask. She listened now in silence.

"It was a poor little place of ours — our parish — but there were green fields all about the village, and country air and quiet; that was what made Edwin think of it," putting up her hand nervously to her coarse, colorless lips. "It was a terrible summer in New York, and we heard how the people were dying every day in the city, and he thought it was his duty to give some other man — some younger man — a chance. He told me of it one night after the evening service — we were walking home together;" sitting up abruptly, "and the next week he had gone there and made the exchange, and before the month was over — It is the man whose place he took who has got our parish now — Edwin's parish," repeating the words with dogged protest.

"Do you mean to say he took it?" the girl asked indignantly.

Mrs. Gard looked up.

"People must live, you know. And when Edwin was not strong enough — Edwin will not have me speak of it. He says it was the will of Providence; but I say — I say it was our home," with a sudden break in the thin, harsh voice. She got up presently. "I didn't mean to have troubled you so long, Miss Varley." She turned towards the door and looked back. "I am a clergyman's wife," she said hurriedly. "I have a right to speak. I have been listening to you all since I have been here. I have sat by and heard you speak. I have heard those young men talk of their carpets and their pictures, and laugh at this, and sneer at that, and talk of the proper understanding of life — Life! There is not one of you who knows what the word means. You call yourselves artists; I say you are nothing but lookers-on — people who stand by and weigh and criticise, while others — And while you are talking about life, my Edwin has gone out and acted; he has laid down his life for another, while you — And you have every thing in this world," the dull color rushing suddenly to her faded cheek.

"I think you should be very proud of your husband," said Constance, simply.

Mrs. Gard stood still a moment, fumbling nervously with the key in the lock.

"I beg your pardon," she said presently, taking out her coarse cotton handkerchief and passing it quickly over her face. "I 'm sure I didn't mean to be uncivil, Miss Varley; and after all your aunt's kindness to my husband — "

She hesitated, and put her hand in her pocket and looked up wistfully.

"I thought I 'd like to show you — " with a hesitating glance at the girl's face. "It 's a photograph we had taken of Edwin's testimonial, — the silver teapot and tray they gave him in the parish. It isn't a very good photograph; but if you look at it by the light — I copied the inscription on the back there," with a foolish, embarrassed laugh.

Miss Varley took the poor little bit of cheap cardboard in her hand and looked at it for a moment steadily, and then she turned and looked at her companion. The sharp, commonplace face had grown almost beautiful by the mere force of sincerity and tenderness. She stooped with a sudden impulse and kissed Mrs. Gard upon the cheek.

"When the time comes, I think some of us may be ready to give up our lives too," she said.

The undemonstrative New England woman looked down, embarrassed by the unusual caress.

"I — I did not mean to be uncivil," she repeated vaguely, and slipped out of the room a moment later, with a mute and doubtful glance.

It was a very mild spring day.

When she was once more alone, Constance turned instinctively to the window, resting her arms upon its cushioned ledge and looking out absently at the soft and luminous gray of the sky.

It was one of those silent, colorless days, when every sound seems to come from far off, and every note of color is intensified to twice its normal value. A day full of light, warm gusts of wind, and quick drops of rain which wet nothing; the sun shining the while behind the clouds with a silvery and muffled glare.

She leaned upon the window-sill and looked out absently.

Once Major Thayer passed under her window; he was coming back from the bazaar with Mr. Gard, and looked up cheerfully and called her name. She watched them pass in at the open doorway, the clergyman following last with stiff alacrity, a smile upon his thin, ascetic face. He held his hat in his hand as he came in, and the light shone down full upon his high, bald forehead and its meek fringe of smooth gray hair.

And this man had known supreme self-sacrifice to an ideal?

She looked after him meditatively, pausing there on the threshold, as it were, of her own experience, with

the soft, enervating wind blowing about her, in a world made fair and sweet with the rapturous awakening of the spring, lingering a moment to look back at this other life with a vague and anxious inquiry. He had answered the question in his own way; but how when it came to her?

The day deepened into noon. She began to move about her room restlessly, fingering her riding-whip, straightening the feather in her hat, dwelling in a hundred different ways upon the details of her preparation. For this ride had grown to assume a curious importance in her eyes. She looked forward to it with a curious, unworded presentiment, the color flushing softly to her cheeks as she thought how, out there in the silent fields, there might come some look, some word — And even to herself she did not end the sentence; standing suddenly still, on her face a smile of grave and incredulous delight.

It was after twelve o'clock when Fanny came up for her.

Stuart was going to Baalbeck. His friends had started; his horse was waiting at the door.

"He is only delaying to say good-by to you," Mrs. Thayer told the girl reproachfully.

It was not an impassioned parting. They shook hands by the foot of the stairway.

"Well, take care of yourself, Constance," said Jack, in his matter-of-fact voice.

On the whole, I think the young man was inclined to feel a little ashamed of his previous emotion.

He turned back once more as he was going out of the door.

"I mean what — what I told you yesterday. I'll come back then," with an emphatic nod and a new look of firmness about his mouth. And then he took her hand in his again and held it.

"You'll come back?" said the Major, catching at his last words; "oh, you'll come back soon enough, never fear. I think I'd back our attractions against Baalbeck."

And so, with a good-natured laugh on the old man's side, they parted.

"It will do the boy good. I don't half like the way he is looking," the Major said to himself softly, gazing after the horseman clattering down the street. And then he turned and contemplated Miss Constance's pale face with a smile of considerable humor, as much as to say, "Good heavens! what tragic young fools these are!" But I don't think that Constance paid much attention to his meaning.

She looked up now, drawing a deep, long breath, with the action of a person putting some puzzling question out of mind. She slipped her hand under the Major's arm, and paced slowly up and down the courtyard at his side.

"I wish I knew some one who could tell me what I wish to know," she said half aloud.

The Major looked at her with undisguised alarm.

"My dear, ask Fanny," he began. "Fanny is the proper person —"

And then Constance laughed.

"I was thinking of the significance of life," she said, with a touch of her old imperiousness. "It seems to make so little difference what one tries to do —"

"A man must be very young to think it makes *any* difference," said the Major, philosophically. "You young people fancy that your little plans and hesitations and decisions are shaping life; and all the while — But mind, I am not giving you any advice, you know."

"No," said Constance, smiling; "you send people to Fanny for that."

"Exactly," the Major assented, with perfect composure; "and when you have been married as long as I have — But now about this ride. I suppose you've heard that I'm ordered out for escort-duty?"

"Oh, yes; you're coming, of course," said Constance, looking down.

The Major smiled to himself confidentially.

"Don't mention it at headquarters," he said aloud, "but I 'm beginning to find it rather a bore to have to regulate my movements by Mrs. Van Ness." Adding hastily a moment later: "To be sure it always pays better to give in to a woman than to have a row with her; she 's sure to carry her point either way."

And then he turned and looked at Constance again with an air of amused relief. It was perfectly evident the girl had not been listening to a word of what he said.

She went back to her own room presently. The absolute quiet of intense expectation had taken possession of her. As the hours passed, this self-control only deepened. Fanny, moving restlessly in and out of the room, found her always in the same attitude — sitting quietly by the window looking out at the sky.

"And what you can find in that dull, gray day to stare at is more than I can see," the little woman told her at last with secret impatience.

"If you watched it long enough you would see that all those clouds are moving," the girl answered, looking up with a sudden smile in her blue eyes. There was something in the silence, the still and ceaseless unrest of this colorless day, which suited her fancy. She could feel the minutes passing one by one, and the sensation gave her a certain pleasure. She had no wish to hurry the flight of time; on the contrary, this pause of suspense seemed to her inexpressibly grateful. She kept her thoughts turned resolutely away from what might be coming, only from time to time she felt her heart beating quicker, and once she put her hand up to her eyes with a sudden smile to find them full of tears.

But all the day was not full of this same silence. Down by old Ahmed's house, near the shoemakers' bazaar, the narrow street was crowded with loitering groups of men. Now and then these groups were scattered by the passing of the bare-legged porters bending double under the weight of their heavy bales; newcomers were constantly arriving, and at every moment the door

opened to give passage to some anxious-faced merchant or swarthy Bedawy, with scant, discolored drapery and imperturbable gait. At one moment a large white donkey came trotting down the street, shaking his crimson trappings and bells, and every one made way respectfully for its master, Ahmed himself coming to the door to receive the small, wrinkled old man in the brown-and-white striped *abbas* and the yellow handkerchief bound about his temples with cords of camels' hair.

As the gate was thrown open before him, the men waiting about outside could catch a brief glimpse of a crowded courtyard, a curious medley of bales and boxes and rope-bound saddles and lines of waiting dromedaries, huge threadbare-looking beasts, moving their long, thin necks restlessly from side to side, or crouching in uncouth rest along the narrow strip of shadow by the wall. The place was full of men and noise and color — the guttural moaning of camels and voluble Arabic voices, and white-clad figures and fluttering robes of blue.

"By Jòve! a fellow can't help but envy you," said Ferris, looking out at the shifting crowd.

Mr. Lawrence, to whom the words were addressed, was taking a last look at his old studio. Here, too, was every sign of movement and change; bare walls and corded boxes, and a confused litter of papers and half-finished sketches and empty color-tubes strewing the tables and floor.

He looked up now. "I have left you that portfolio of drawings. And, by-the-way, Ferris, there's a lot of blue tiles at Aboo Antika's — I've got the old beggar's receipt for them somewhere; I told him to send them around to you. I should like to have you keep them. They will do to build a mausoleum to my memory," with a laugh. "You know you never expect to see me back."

And then again, after a moment's silence: "You 'll be glad to hear old Ahmed has come to terms at last."

"About that girl?"

Lawrence nodded. "It's all settled; I'm going to paint her. It suddenly occurred to our friend Ahmed that, being an infidel Jewess already, it could hardly hurt little Ayassa much to win her dowry from the exceeding folly of a dog of a Christian. It is a view of the case I take care not to discourage. I shall make something out of that I think, old fellow," looking up with a confident smile. "I believe old Ahmed hardly expected me to go," he added presently; "and, indeed, until last night —"

The fascination of desert travel seemed to have taken possession of Lawrence already. He went out a dozen times in the course of the morning to watch the preparations of the caravan. This silent and sober prevision of great distances, of a barren and lifeless land, affected his imagination. The Bedawy sheikh halted a moment under his window, and the sight of his keen and fleshless face, the thin, black beard and piercing eyes looking out from under the shadow of his gaudy head-dress, gave him a curious thrill of excitement. He sat down and began telling Ferris of his former experiences — of desert stretches seen at dawn, of long, silent journeys through the cooler hours before the morning, of evening encampments, and changeless skies high-arched above illimitable space. And through all his rambling talk, through all the enforced quiet of his manner, Ferris detected, or thought that he detected, the presence of some unwonted emotion held out of sight. This very restlessness was something new in Lawrence.

On entering the studio, his friend had found him busied in nailing up some of the various boxes which filled the room, and although he rose at once, throwing away his hammer with some muttered allusion to the cursed stupidity of these Arab fellows, it had struck Ferris even then that there was something beside the mere desire of travel which was urging him on to push his preparations beyond the possibility of recall.

"You might have left all this until to-morrow," he

suggested once, looking around at the dismantled studio; "you will find it deuced uncomfortable work waiting all the afternoon with nothing especial to do."

"I've got an engagement," said Lawrence; "I am going out riding. I promised to show Miss Varley some gardens outside the gates."

Mr. Ferris was silent a moment.

"Stuart has gone away, I think Davenant told me?"

"Stuart," said Mr. Lawrence, looking his friend steadily in the face, "has gone for four or five days to Baalbeck."

"I suppose you have told them all — the people down there at the hotel, I mean — that you were leaving?"

The young man colored slightly. "I have not mentioned it. I have not seen any one since it was finally decided; it is not a matter of such very great importance," looking out of the window absently. "I hate to have my affairs discussed by a lot of women," he said with sudden irritation.

Mr. Ferris smiled significantly. "I took a curious liking to that girl, you know," he added presently with a certain irrelevance, and Denis did not ask him what he meant. In the silence which followed there came a knock upon the studio-door. "I say, Lawrence — hallo, Ferris, and how did you come here? — I say, Lawrence, there's a boy out here who's asking after you," said Davenant, putting in his head.

He came in and looked about him disconsolately. "I hate these changes. I wish I had not come to spoil my old impression. Do have that boy in, Lawrence. He's got a beautiful face, I noticed, and it will be something to look at," with a reproachful glance at the bare walls.

The boy was the same boy Jew of whom mention has been made already; a half-grown lad, whom Denis had picked up between two and three o'clock on a bitter March morning, half starved and nearly speechless with the cold. He had been turned out of the house where he worked some day or two before, and had been living in any way he could ever since, prowling about the

bazaars by day, and fighting with the pariah dogs for the warmest corner at night. On further inquiry, he admitted frankly that he had been turned out for stealing his late master's dinner. He also remarked casually that that was the way he had been getting his dinners ever since, and there was a naïve unconcern about his way of mentioning the fact which appealed forcibly to Lawrence's taste for the morally picturesque. He took the boy home with him that night from motives which, I am bound to admit, had more to do with the state of the temperature and the relative thickness of their coats than with the higher forms of justice; and the lad had attached himself persistently to the young man ever since, carrying his painting-traps from place to place, spending whole days waiting for him outside the door-step — a loyal and patient and utterly irresponsible little scamp.

He came in now, carrying a small, folded package which he placed listlessly upon the nearest table. He went and leaned against the wall, an effeminate, supple figure in scarlet and white, gazing calmly at the three young men with his still, dark, oriental eyes. "And what will become of that fellow when you leave?" said Ferris.

"Oh, I take the boy with me. That is the worst of playing amateur providence," with a careless look and laugh.

"You are always picking up desperate characters, Lawrence. You will have to be suppressed some day from motives of sound political economy," said George.

The package had come unfastened as the boy laid it down; some yellow beads were lying on the table.

"More tribute to the beautiful Ayassa? If it's any thing worth looking at I wish you would hang it up in a conspicuous place. These naked walls are simply intolerable," said Davenant, putting his hand to his eyes as though they ached.

Denis laughed. "It is only a string of beads I have been having mended for Miss Varley."

But he neither touched nor looked at them until the others had left him, and even then he hesitated a moment before taking the bauble into his hands. A man with something of a woman's sentiment for trifles I have called him; he looked at these beads now with a curious attention, holding them a long while between his fingers, as though the mere contact brought him, in some mysterious way, in closer relation to their owner. He found some fanciful analogy between the impression the girl had made upon him and these smooth, delicate circles of sunshine-colored amber. "Something apart and mysterious and inimitable," he thought idly, slipping the yellow chaplet through his fingers, and, as about every thing else which she had worn the day before, he noticed that about these beads there lingered the faint suggestion of clinging oriental perfume.

CHAPTER XXVI.

"AFTER THREE YEARS."

THEY started. There was quite a little crowd collected about the doorway to see the young girl appear in her riding-dress. Mrs. Van Ness herself had come down into the courtyard where she stood leaning upon Fanny's arm, and watching her niece's movements with coldly-unfavorable eyes.

"And to think, my dear, that your husband should insist upon finishing that sketch before he starts. A man of his age! It is really too ridiculous," she said with sudden exasperation, as the injudicious Lione brushed by her with one of his ecstatic bounds.

"I am sure, Aunt Van, if you knew the trouble I have had in persuading him to go at all;" Fanny protested in her plaintive little voice.

And then they both turned to look at the tall, erect girl moving swiftly down the winding stair, and hold-

ing up her habit and fastening her gloves as she came.

"Such a lovely day, Aunt Van! Down, sir; be quiet, Lione! Such a day for a ride!" she said with such frank, eager joyousness in all her manner that even Mrs. Van Ness was startled for the moment into something very like assent; and it was only when they had started down the street together, Miss Varley's horse shying and prancing at every wave of Lione's golden-brown ears — it was only when the two were fairly off upon their expedition that the old lady devoted herself to the pleasing task of finding fault with Fanny, which she did with an ingenuity of insinuation and a calm severity of conclusion which would, I fear, have afforded a certain grim and retributive satisfaction to the Major.

"For I find something shocking, positively shocking, quite *inconvenant*, in the way you allow Constance to dispose of her own time. Constance has a will of her own? Nonsense, Fanny! A woman of your age," looking Mrs. Thayer stonily in the face, "should know how to manage better than that. There, my dear, you need not answer me. I know what I am saying perfectly well. I consider," said Mrs. Van Ness calmly, "that my niece is as good as engaged to young Stuart. She does not think so, but I do. And under the circumstances nothing could be in more deplorable taste than the slightest suspicion of a flirtation with Mr. Lawrence — a charming young fellow; a capital listener; rather different in that respect from your husband, my dear Fanny, who never seems to be aware that I am speaking — a charming young fellow," said Mrs. Van Ness majestically, "but *not* a marrying man."

But this was a consideration which did not seem to have occurred to either of the two young people. It would have been difficult indeed to have found two people more thoroughly well satisfied than they, as they picked their way leisurely along the crowded streets, the horses slipping and starting over the smooth, round

stones until the noise of the clattering hoofs overpowered every other sound; and their riders were silent, only turning their heads from time to time to exchange a well-contented glance. Once, as they were passing Ahmed's house, the cries of the camels frightened Miss Varley's horse, who shied violently across the road. She was a brave rider, and independent to a fault, but now, when Lawrence laid his hand upon her reins, she gave them up without a word. It seemed the most natural thing to them both that he should have assumed entire control of their movements. He spoke of it once:—

"I am taking it for granted that I know which way you wish to go," he said smiling.

She looked up brightly.

"I like to be tyrannized over," she said, and then, all at once, it seemed to her that she had always liked it.

They rode on. Some half-a-dozen Turkish soldiers were lounging and smoking about the city-gate; a laden camel was crouching by the roadside; a heavy ordnance-wagon jolted noisily on before them between two lines of sordid yellow wall; a few paces more, and a palm-tree nodded to them from some hidden garden, the creaking wagon stopped with a clank before the barrack door, another gate lifted before them its piles of Roman masonry.

"Now!" said Lawrence, pointing with his whip. The horses sprang forward with a common impulse. The river rushed and foamed on a level with the turf bordering the wide, white road; and there were tall, green poplar-trees standing deep in the limpid water, and all strong, vigorous-growing things were there—tall bulrushes, and low, thick willows, and dark beds of lily-leaves up-springing greenly beneath a pale and luminous sky.

"At last!" said Lawrence, drawing a deep breath.

She looked all about her, and laughed for very joy. "At last!"

And then for many minutes there was no other word spoken; no sound but the muffled beat of horses' hoofs sweeping along in quickening cadence on a line with the water's flow.

It would be difficult to say what the young girl was experiencing in those moments. A feeling of wild delight and of unreality — above all, a sentiment of unreality mingled in the strangest fashion with the purely physical exultation in rapid motion and the touch of the warm, moist wind. It was a gray, sunless day, but the horses stopped of their own accord at the foot of the second hill, panting deep breaths, with heaving flanks, and breasts all streaked and shining with heat.

"There must be a touch of khemseen in the air. We shall have to take it a little more quietly," said Denis, leaning back in his saddle, and pulling off his hat.

They went on at foot-pace. In that first, long gallop they had left all sight, all suggestion of the city far behind. They were passing now between two long lines of blossoming orchards, deep, walled-in spaces of white and spreading boughs.

When they ceased to ride fast, the day seemed to grow more still; there was not a breath of wind stirring, not a sound; they were entirely alone, only all about them there were great dome-like masses of bloom and whiteness rising up against the gray of the sky. The river, too, had wandered away; but when they listened they could catch a hundred faint, murmuring sounds of water, the voice of countless, unseen brooks deep-hidden in the orchard-grass. It was like some forgotten day which had strayed back from its place in the very early spring; the atmosphere was tepid and moist, as on some silent afternoon in April, with every now and then a thrill of warmer and more enervating air. The sky was low and gray and restless. The horses were content to walk on slowly, whinnying from time to time, and striking the ground with impatient feet.

Once, when they were passing before a high, wooden paling, Lawrence pointed out the place to her.

"Ahmed's garden. I have had it opened for you. I told the Major to meet us there. We will dismount and go in and see it, if you like, on our way back."

"You must positively let me get a sketch of you to-day," he said a moment later. "The merest outline, a pencil-note, will be enough; but I want it this afternoon."

She smiled, well pleased. "Whenever you like,—to-day or to-morrow."

"You have been telling me that for the last three days," said Denis.

"Is it really only three days since we came here?" with a startled glance. "Why, it seems—" She hesitated, a sudden realization of what those three days counted for in her life sweeping over her and checking her speech. "But you shall have the sketch whenever you please," she said hurriedly.

"I hardly think that I shall have time to-morrow—" He paused so long that she looked up surprised.

"To-morrow?"

He opened his lips to speak of his journey. I do not know what impulse it was which kept him silent. The day was so harmonious; they were both so contented; there seemed something absolutely brutal in marring this fine unison with any thought of change. And with those questioning blue eyes fixed upon his face, it seemed easier to speak of any thing than leaving.

"Tell me what was the matter with you last night," he said, putting out his hand and drawing a wisp of her horse's thin mane through his fingers. "I wanted to ask you, several times."

Her cheek flushed a little. "You? Why, you were talking to my aunt," she said evasively.

"I have made a very good impression on Mrs. Van Ness," said Lawrence, smiling. "And, by the way, she has not told you that I am a very charming fellow?"

"Never!"

"Ah, well, that is all to come then. You wait and see. I am exceedingly charming, — quite remarkably so, in fact; and when I go home to New York, whenever that event may occur, I am to be invited to a dinner in consequence, — to a little dinner."

"Only eight?"

"Only eight, of course. I call that exceedingly disrespectful of you, Miss Varley."

She laughed. "And yet I am fond of my aunt, you know — in a fashion."

"So is Mrs. Thayer." He dropped the lock of coarse black hair, and straightened himself suddenly in his saddle. "You will not tell me why you were so sad last night, then?" looking keenly at her.

She was silent, the flush deepening upon her face: a girl made reticent by temperament as well as habit; unused to sympathy. She would have told him any thing; but even to herself the words seemed meagre and unsatisfactory when they came. But it was impossible he should not understand.

"Mr. Stuart had told me he was going away. It is only for a few days, but I knew it was my fault, and — there are some things that seem so hard to do. I could not help being sorry," her eyes filling suddenly with tears.

He was the only person who would understand her. It was so easy, so natural to tell him every thing. She turned to him now eagerly. "And then Aunt Van had been finding fault with me all the morning, you know."

"About Mr. Stuart?"

She looked up relieved. It was plain he *must* understand to have asked that question. There was something in the expression of his face which made her shrink back doubtfully, the same baffled, disappointed feeling of last night creeping over her. And yet he had not said a word; he was only looking straight ahead at the long, empty road, his hand resting carelessly on his horse's neck.

"It was about Mr. Stuart?"

He turned, and repeated his question gravely; and somehow, she could not have told why, but it seemed to her that there was more in his meaning than in the simple words. Yet she answered him with all her customary directness.

"Yes; about Mr. Stuart."

"Aunt Van does not mean any harm," she said incoherently, a moment later, bending over to stroke the horse between his eyes; "I would not like you to think that. Only one's relatives have a way of expecting you to be happy after their own ideas of happiness; although, I must say, my experience of near relatives is rather limited. I think there cannot be many girls with so few people belonging to them as I —" breaking off with a confused laugh.

He looked at her fixedly for a minute or two. "Is Mrs. Van Ness your only aunt? Tell me all about her. Tell me something more about yourself. It seems curious to think how little I know about you in reality," bending forward a little with one of his rare, sudden smiles. Whatever might have been the motive which had made him irresponsive, it was plain that he had rid himself of its influence for the nonce. "Tell me," he said; and she no more hesitated to grow communicative at his bidding than one of the blossoms about them would have hesitated about unfolding its petals in the sun.

There was so little to tell, she answered. Mrs. Van Ness was her only near connection; yes. "Aunt Van was my mother's half-sister, and much, very much, the elder of the two. My mother was only twenty when she died," the girl said softly. "My father has a picture of her, taken just after their marriage, — an old-fashioned pastel thing with pink cheeks and her hair all brushed back; but I think it must have been a good likeness, it looks so very much like me."

She was silent for a moment, looking out wistfully at the sweet spring fields. "She was only twenty; younger than I am," she repeated softly; "only twenty, and my

father loved her so dearly, and she died. You see I can't help caring for Aunt Van a little, can I?" turning to Lawrence with a sudden appeal.

She was so near that he could see the very quivering of her lips. He put up his hand to his own mouth uneasily, smoothing down the ends of his moustache. "Engaged to marry Stuart," he reminded himself once or twice; chance words out of Mrs. Van Ness's confidences coming back with gathering meaning. "Damn the woman!" he thought savagely.

"You ought to wish me joy," he said to Constance a moment later; "this is my birth-day. To-day I'm thirty-one. I suppose that is a reason for being congratulated?"

"Eight, nine — only nine years older than I," said Constance.

He nodded. "Nine years in point of fact, perhaps; but I am incalculably older than you in reality. Why, I had half got through with life before I was your age. There must be centuries of experience between us by this time," with a sudden tone in his voice which seemed to push her miles away.

She looked up at him with a patient, puzzled glance. She had done nothing; there was no reason he should be unkind to her, — with a sudden, childish passion of resentment. It was unkind, unjust.

"You should take that horse up a little more on his curb, Miss Varley. So. These Arab horses are unreliable brutes; and I can't be responsible for you if you are not obedient," adjusting the reins slowly, and looking into her face the while. He saw something there which seemed to amuse him. "Yes, it is my birthday. We used to have a way of celebrating our birthdays when I was a boy at home: presents first, of course; and then, before we went to sleep at night, a sort of general confession, an overhauling of all the year's mistakes. I used to look forward to that part of it with a sort of nervous horror when I was a little fellow; it is only as one gets older that one learns

to take a paternal interest in the enumeration of one's faults."

She bent down and touched Lione's head with the lash of her riding-whip.

"Well?"

"Now you are very proud," watching her averted face with the same attentive amusement. "A few years ago, if any one had told you that, you would have felt very unhappy about it and promised to reform; and now — I want you to observe how the best of us degenerate — you are playing with your dog and thinking —"

She looked up and laughed.

"Well?" closing her mouth defiantly.

"The Sphinx in person? No; I don't read thoughts. Your pride is so much a part of you," he said suddenly, "that I honestly believe it would be easier for you to stand by and see your dearest hope founder than put out your hand or save it by a word."

She turned to him with a startled air.

"Would I? I don't know," the color rising suddenly about her throat and cheek.

"I know it," said Lawrence gravely. "Now, my own faults — my own faults," flicking his horse's ears, with a frank, careless laugh, "are vastly worse, belong to quite a lower order of moral turpitude. For one thing, I am more easily diverted from my purpose than any one you ever knew. I should call it a certain plasticity of nature if I were describing the trait to an outsider; but between you and me," confidentially, "I think it is a horribly mortifying fact. My only line of self-defence is a sort of stony obduracy," laughing. "For if I once begin to listen to the voice of the charmer! — And the worst of it is that it isn't people alone, but days, places, the very commonest things which influence me. Why, the mere fact that the wind is blowing from a certain quarter — I'm like a French revolution — you know the story?" with a sudden touch of mockery — "I can't build my barricades if it rains."

"But that is only one fault — if you call it a fault,"

said Constance seriously. "For my part I think I am just a little tired of hermetically-sealed natures. At least — I don't know. The outside world seems to me to be something more than just a side-scene or a farm."

"Did it ever occur to you that there might be people yet, susceptible to precisely those influences which the Greeks embodied in all the wild and beautiful creatures of the water and the woods — in fauns and dryads and the shy, white nymphs? It 's all very well to call that sort of thing mythical," said Lawrence, "but it was no more a fiction than the religion of the Egyptians was a fiction until the Greeks appeared, or than the religion of the early Hebrews, with all its strange admixture of idol worship and curious Chaldean lore. Why, the high places of these very hills around us were once as sacred to unseen and beautiful or terrible presences as the most nymph-haunted wood in Greece. And who knows what tales will be told, in the course of some thousand years, of a religion which peopled the remote and silent places of mountain and forest and lagoon with way-side shrines and crosses, until there is hardly a spot in Catholic Europe untenanted by the effigy of a god? And then all the long litany of saints — It will not be difficult for our descendants to trace out our mythology, I fancy."

Constance smiled.

"The plastic nature again, Mr. Lawrence? I might have thought Mr. Davenant was speaking if I had shut my eyes."

"Oh, come now," said Denis hastily; "I said plastic, you know, not imitative. I believe in the niceties of language, Miss Varley — "

"In discussing your faults?"

"In speaking of myself generally. And I don't know about the wisdom of confessing any further. It might affect your present opinion — "

"Try me," said Constance, with her clear, confident glance.

The horses had been moving on while they were

talking. They had reached the extreme limit of the Field of Damascus, a vast and undulating plain of reddish soil, streaked here and there with lines and patches of young grass. The circling hills seemed nearer and darker under this effect of colorless sky, and between them and that farther range of mountains they could catch a gleam of silvery-looking water, a still, unruffled lake, at which Lawrence glanced curiously from time to time.

"Do you think it would be too far for us to ride out there?" Constance asked, pointing to the water with her whip.

He looked at her gaily.

"If one could get there! It is odd enough, but this place, this red clay soil, and that gap over there in the hills remind me so strongly of a certain part of Virginia. I spent part of a summer there once."

"I know," the girl said eagerly; "when you were fighting, when you were in the war."

"When I was looking on at other people fighting, you mean."

"Ah," she said, turning quickly, with a great light in her face. "I know more about it than you think. I know what you did. I know — the Major has told me."

"The Major is growing imaginative. But a woman will never understand what a plain, prosaic thing the greater part of a war must be. You forget the camp-life and the tedium and the dulness. And you're right about that, perhaps; there's nothing very heroic in bad rations and muddy roads — and toothache. I think that was one of the greatest shocks I ever had in my life" (laughing); "the first time I slept under canvas there were three men in my tent with the toothache. I went down there with the idea that every man fighting for the North was something between a martyr and a hero, and I found them grumbling over a camp-fire with their faces tied up in handkerchiefs like so many old women. Fancy indulging in hero-worship about a man who swore at you for not being a professional dentist!"

"But you did other things beside that," she insisted; "you were in a battle; you were wounded yourself trying to help some wounded men; Tom has told me. And I think I would rather have done that — what you did — than —" She bent down and examined the buckle of her reins critically. "I wish you would tell me all about it," the light growing bright and steady in her eyes.

"But you know it all; there isn't any story," said Lawrence quietly. "There were a lot of us down there. I wasn't a soldier myself, you know."

She nodded.

"I know. You were one of the Sanitary Commission people; you were taking care of the poor men in the hospitals, saving their lives —"

"And trying to keep them provided with tolerable soup and biscuit. We might as well stick to facts while we are about it, Miss Varley. Well — I really don't know how to make any thing out of such an unromantic experience. I happened to be out with the ambulance-men one day. There had been a lively skirmish going on for a couple of days all along the front, and a good many men were missing, shot or bushwhacked, we did not know which; and so, as I said before, some of us started out to look them up. We knew where we were going when we started — to a place where they had driven in our pickets the night before."

"Yes!"

"Well, we got there and found a couple of graycoats alive still — our men had come down on them so quick that they hadn't time to carry off their wounded, so we sent these two into camp on stretchers. They both died on their way there, poor devils! and we started for home ourselves. And then — I really can't tell you how it happened — there was a lot of firing, and we all started down the hill at a run, dodging in and out behind the trees; and the first thing I knew I tripped over something, and found myself lying on my back among the sassafras-bushes with a couple of bullets in me."

She nodded gravely, rubbing the buckle softly with the finger of her glove.

"Go on!"

"Well, that was about the end of it, as far as I was concerned. I suppose I must have fainted then — loss of blood and all that sort of thing, you know — because, when I opened my eyes again, I could see the stars shining down between the sides of the gully. It was a beautiful, starlight night, I remember, and I could see every thing about me — the cracks in the rocks, and the leaves on the bushes nearest me, and then the face of the man — the man I stumbled over, you know."

She looked up.

"I suppose he had been dead a good while," said Lawrence slowly; "a young fellow — he looked like a gentleman, too, with long hair like a young Virginian. I couldn't move much, you know, so I just lay still and looked at him: he had a fine face, not disfigured in the least. And then towards morning it got awfully cold, and then I felt as though somebody was sawing me in two with a piece of red-hot iron; well, that was pretty bad. And then two or three times I died. And every time I came to, there was this fellow lying still beside me, with his eyes wide open; and at last I got so that I found a sort of companionship in having him there; and I suppose I went off my head a little, for I remember quite well hearing myself speaking to him, and saying the most beautiful things you can imagine about death and immortality — and swearing frightfully all the while."

"And then?"

"Well, then — but this was after an interval of two or three hundred years, you know, and I did not much care what happened — then, just before daybreak, I saw some lights moving through the bushes, and I heard the voices of some men, and I couldn't call out to them. Perhaps that was the worst moment of it all, when I found I could not speak above a whisper. However,

they came up all the same — I warned you in the beginning that it was a very mild tragedy, Miss Varley — and one of them put his lantern down over the top of my bush — "

"And then, what did he do? — what did he say?" asked Constance.

Lawrence looked up and laughed. "He said — I was in civilian's dress, you know — he said, 'Hollo, here's another of those d — d newspaper correspondents;' and that put me in an awful rage, because I knew the man by sight: his name was Jackson. So I bided my time, and the moment they had poured some brandy down my throat I opened my eyes as wide as I could, and I said: 'Don't be a fool, Bill Jackson!' and there, as far as I know, the war ended. It was nothing but surgeons and hospital-gruel after that."

He gathered his reins together as he ceased speaking, and the horses went off across the plain at a gallop. "You still want to go as far as that lake?" he asked presently, looking back over his shoulder at Constance.

Something in his tone puzzled her. "If it is not too far," she began doubtfully, trying to see what he meant by his face. "Is there any thing peculiar — I don't quite understand. Is any thing the matter with that lake, Mr. Lawrence?"

"Look at Lione," motioning with his whip.

The dog had been bounding on before them, he had reached the edge of the gleaming water now, and ran straight forward, the shining waves parting and falling away from him on either side.

"It is the mirage," said Denis quietly; "is it possible you did not know it? But indeed I hardly remember ever having seen such a perfect one before."

"Mirage!" she repeated incredulously.

They checked their horses and stood still looking at it. The wide, shining expanse of water lay apparently but a stone's throw off, seeming to gather into itself and focus all the light of the day and sky. "Mirage," said

Constance slowly. She forced a smile, even tried to laugh, when Lawrence insisted that they ought to ride on until they reached the lake, since that had been her object; but the laugh proved a failure; there was something strangely disconcerting about the illusion just then.

"And I thought — I had meant that to be the end of our ride," she said, with a touch of superstitious regret. It was the merest folly, but it sufficed to make her face a little graver as they turned their horses' heads homewards. And on the crest of the hill she paused and looked back at the still and glittering phantasm with a sudden shiver of dumb, unreasonable dread.

"Are you looking for Lione?" the young man asked carelessly. "He has passed us already; I saw him running down the road."

"Oh, he has learned to take care of himself."

She answered lightly, but it was not so easy to shake off the disturbing impression. Now, at this moment, when her life seemed trembling in the balance for good or ill, the slightest incident — a word, a look — seemed to have gained a sudden, vital importance. There were no trifles in Miss Varley's eyes to-day. They went back by another road. The river had joined them again; full-fed and swift and silent beneath its canopy of boughs. And now, in attempting a short cut, they passed through an abandoned Turkish cemetery — hundreds of ruined stones crowding about the white-domed tomb of a *santon*. It was a singularly deserted looking place, all overgrown with thick, rank grass. A peach-tree leaned its full and pink-tipped branches against the weather-beaten grave, and one small twig which had burst into premature blossom brushed its rose-colored petals against Lawrence's shoulder, as the riders picked their way between the fallen stones.

"Ah, there is something for you. You must have that," the young man said, bending from his saddle.

> Flower o' the peach —
> Death for us all and his own life for each.

"Here, Miss Varley."

She took the blossoms silently, and fastened them in her dress. They made a pretty spot of color there, Lawrence told her, glancing back. "You always used to wear flowers. I never remember having seen you at The Farm without some flowers about you. I always thought I had a good memory for details, but I never knew how good it was until within these last few days," he said, watching her curiously.

She caught his look and turned her face away.

"I remember things a long while. We shall be late, I am afraid, Mr. Lawrence. You said the Major was to meet us, I believe?" with a sudden hurry in her voice.

She looked down at her blossoms two or three times as they cantered along the road, putting up her hand to touch them. It was a long time since he had given her flowers.

When they reached the gate of Ahmed's garden they both dismounted, Lawrence leading the horses by their bridles along the narrow path. It was a large and green enclosure which they now entered; a vegetable garden at first; a place thick-set with apricot-trees, divided into squares by countless small channels of running water, the ground quite covered by thick, dark, spreading leaves. Farther on was an open space of grass, where Lawrence tethered the horses, and beyond that the ground sloped rapidly down to the river; a long, white stretch of trees in fullest bloom.

They took a path which led them to the water. The fruit-trees met and branched above their heads; thick, foam-white masses of cherry-blossom, and sturdy apple-boughs, all clustered over with crisp, rosy flowers, and the frail, shivering beauty of the pear. And here, in these sheltered places, were young peach-trees, with bare, shining stems, and here and there a single rose-flushed star; and down in the hollows the full-petalled, flesh-colored quince-blossoms, which opened wide among the coarser leaves. It was not an orchard; it could not

be called a flower-garden; it was only a place of blossoming — the home of all strong, green things; for here were broad-leaved vines climbing between the branches, and a tangled network of rose-bushes covered all over with large, green rosebuds streaked with dullest red; and on the ground the grass was gay with tall, rank buttercups and the flaunting yellow of the melon-flower; and by the edge of the river were all thick growths of water-plants, and leafy, lisping poplars — "the verdurous wall of Paradise;" and everywhere the clean, moist smell of the earth, the feeling of abundant moving water, the sense of exuberant vegetable life.

There was something in the languid softness of the air which made the slightest movement an exertion. They rested now, warm and breathless, upon a dark, elastic couch of lily-leaves close by the river's brink. A pale and silvery sunshine was breaking through the clouds.

"Listen! it seems as though one could almost hear the things growing in this stillness," Constance said; and then for several minutes they were silent, she fanning herself slowly with a bunch of the stiff lily-leaves, and Denis lying upon his back, his hands clasped behind his head, looking up at the gray sky through the motionless white boughs.

It was a delicious moment of satisfied animal existence. They could feel themselves living, a part of all the still, strong life about them, growing slowly conscious of a hundred well-nigh imperceptible sights and sounds — the varying voice of the water, and sudden mysterious thrills and shivers among the leaves, where not a breath of air was stirring — a whole new world of noiseless insect-existence; the low, sharp note of some passing bird; the ceaseless dropping of over-blown petals into deep grass.

In the intervals of sunshine the trees seemed to grow larger and whiter.

"How far can you see?" the young girl asked, after

a long pause. "A moment ago all the line of that hill came out in shadow, and there, between those poplars, I could see something shining, a line of yellow close to the horizon, — a line of desert sands."

"The desert!" repeated Lawrence vaguely. "'In the desert love builds triumphal arches out of the shifting sands.' That is a Persian proverb, you know. I think," picking up a dead bit of wood and snapping it in two between his fingers with a sudden, impatient recollection of Stuart, "I think it is an everyday fact."

He tossed the broken splinters in the stream and sat up abruptly. The charm of silence was broken with the first intrusion — even the imaginary intrusion — of another personality. He sat up now and talked, talked to her with an impulse of confidence which he had never felt but once before in his life towards any woman. They spoke of many things, but it was noticeable they spoke more of things than of people; of books which they had read; of impressions which they had received; of a hundred personal fancies and desires peculiar to each, and yet shared or understood by the other.

"You are the only person I ever met who reminded me of my mother," Lawrence said to her once. "No two people could have grown up under more widely-differing influences, and yet there is something — a certain quality of nature. She was, in one sense of the word, an ignorant woman; she never cared for politics or literature; she lived and died a fervent Roman Catholic, an ardent Southerner and believer in the divine right of slavery — there was hardly a point on which, as I grew older, we two were agreed; — and yet, when I remember her now, I can see that there has never been a good impulse in my life, a love of the beautiful, a recognition of high purpose in others, which I cannot trace directly to my mother's influence. She was a woman who evoked goodness in others as the sun brings life out of the frozen earth," he said slowly, with a sudden thrill of emotion in his well-controlled voice.

It was the first time since she had known him that Constance had heard him speak of his early life. She listened to him now with a silent, passionate tenderness, extending back through all those unknown years, for she was curiously ignorant of all but the most evident facts of that past. Lawrence was a man who seldom spoke of himself; and since the very first days of their acquaintance, in speaking to others, his name had never crossed her lips.

As he talked to her now of those old boyish days, he seemed, with every careless, familiar detail, to grow nearer and more inexpressibly dear; and at every word she shrank more into herself, growing more reserved and silent. She had been used to think of him as of an ideal, isolated, away from the contact of common associations and ties; and this new aspect of his life impressed her with a curious sense of bewilderment; it seemed so full and self-sufficing an existence, and she so much a stranger to it all.

She had asked him some question about his mother.

"The girls — my sisters — were never so intimate with her," he said. "I don't know how it was, but in some way we two always seemed to belong more particularly to one another. Long after I was grown up we were in the habit of going off constantly on expeditions, travelling, amusing ourselves together, until I was quite a young man, until" (with a sudden effort) "I married."

She bent her head, keeping her eyes fixed upon the water. "Yes," she said gravely, "I know."

But there had been something in the words which jarred upon them both. The girl rose hastily a moment after. "If we should miss the Major! You told him to meet us at the gate yonder," in a tone which seemed to put an end to the discussion.

She followed him silently to the gate. It was something which she had never felt before — this dumb and burning passion. They had never hitherto been thrown into close enough personal relations to evoke a feeling

of jealousy, but now — Her hand trembled at his touch as he helped her into the saddle, but the eyes which met his glance were steady as ever and unspeakably sad. It was a look he remembered long after; at the moment it had slipped aside, crowded out of mind by the merest detail of fact. For the Major was nowhere to be seen.

"If you really care about meeting him, we might walk our horses back as far as the cross-roads. He is after his time now. We are sure to find him at the turning."

They started back accordingly. The day had grown darker; the uniform, gray sky was parting now, torn into jagged, flying strips of cloud. "A sea-sky, that," Lawrence remarked idly, glancing up at the hurrying and vexed mists. The words seemed to bring back some other recollection.

"I had a letter from a friend of mine. You have been at Nahant, Miss Varley?" looking at her with a new attention.

"Yes."

"You went a good deal into society there? You knew a great many people?"

"I was staying with my aunt last summer. Yes, we went out a great deal. I did not like it," she said indifferently.

"I had a letter from a man there, a day or two ago. I daresay you know him — Morris Stuyvesant. He and I are rather old friends."

It amused him for the moment to see the effect of his words in the sudden color which flushed across her cheek. But she answered with the simple straightforwardness which gave a purpose and a meaning to her slightest word. "I did know Mr. Stuyvesant. He is a friend of my aunt's. I should not have thought," looking at him gravely, "that you would have made Mr. Stuyvesant a friend of yours."

He did not reply at once, and when he did it was only to say quietly, "One has to know all kinds of men. I 've

seen a great many worse fellows than Stuyvesant," but he was annoyed at himself all the same; he felt fastidiously irritated at the thought of having introduced this stranger's name between them. It suited him for the moment to ignore every thing but the pleasure of this frank, responsive companionship; and already a dozen things had occurred since they started to remind him of the limitations set all about their intercourse. This one spring afternoon might be all that they should know of each other for years, he thought regretfully; for as Mr. Stuart's wife — And then he looked away across the opening fields before them. But was it true? he asked himself. Was it?

"If you don't mind waiting here a moment, the Major is sure to join us now in a minute or two," he said aloud; "and meanwhile I might get my drawing."

He drew a small sketch-book out of his pocket as he spoke. They had halted at the turning of two roads. Behind them lay the foamy sea of blossoms, before them, the bare and melancholy plain stretched to the city-walls. The tepid, fitful wind blowing across these open spaces came to them sweet with inexplicable sweetness, and faint with all the languor of the spring. It was the hour for sunset, but the sad, gray sky hung pale and irresponsive above the empty plain. It was only far off and low down by the horizon that a warmer flush — a color pale as the later crocus which comes with the autumn skies — showed where the day was dying slowly behind the shadowy hills.

Denis had nearly finished his sketch. He lingered over his work for a moment, looking up from his drawing at the pure and noble outline of the face before him. In those few days it had already become associated in his mind with some of the loveliest things in Nature, — with soft and limpid skies, spring winds, and all the large and liberal stirring of life about the new-born year. But now he looked at her with something of a more personal feeling; with an irritated chafing at the very vagueness of their relations, with a sudden desire

to break out of this charmed space of silence into whatever of real life for good or ill might lie beyond. His journey, his plans, his intentions, had sunk into the insignificance of a dream. All the refining of sentiment, the hesitation which was natural to him had abandoned him at this moment. The whole world seemed to have narrowed down to this; an open plain, a sad, spring twilight, and the face of this silent girl.

But he made an effort to speak in his ordinary tone. "You have forgotten that I had something of yours all this time, and yet I think it is something you care for," putting his hand in his breast-pocket and drawing out her amber beads. "You will let me put them on for you?" His own voice sounded to him uncertain and strange. She held out her bared wrist without speaking, and he wound the string of beads about it awkwardly, his fingers growing suddenly irresolute as they touched the firm white skin.

She drew back shivering. "I think — I mean —"

She turned her head abruptly, put out her hand and picked a leaf from off the nearest branch, and looked at it, and threw it away.

There was a long silence after this. He was sitting with his hand upon the crutch of her saddle. From far down the darkening road came the muffled clatter of horsemen riding fast; their own horses stirred uneasily at the sound, pricking up their ears, with a low whinny of expectation. "I hear some one coming," said Constance beneath her breath.

He did not heed her speaking. "I want to ask you something," he said irresolutely. He passed his hand quickly over his face and looked at her. "I ought not to have spoken to you about Stuyvesant. I knew that you had refused to marry him. I thought I would like to ask you why — if it was, because —" To save his life he could not have mentioned Stuart's name at that moment. "Do you love any one else?" he said brusquely, with a sudden determination to face and know the truth.

She shivered again as though the wind had struck her. For three years she had waited for some such moment, and now words failed her; she tried to speak, and felt her lips tremble. She could not look at him; and *now* did he not understand? And then through the silence she heard the measured hoof-beats coming nearer and nearer.

"I did not marry Mr. Stuyvesant," repeating his words blindly, "because I loved some one else. Because — It is three years now — three years — "

"That you love Stuart? I knew it!" He spoke the words out sharply, putting up his hand as though to prevent her saying them. "I think — God knows," with a sudden, generous effort, "I hope you will both be happy. He — he is a good fellow, Stuart. He deserves his luck."

He was careful not to look at her as he spoke, keeping his face turned towards the approaching riders, jealously careful of any thing which might cast so much as a shadow over the happy unconsciousness of her love. Every tender, every chivalric instinct in his nature had been touched by the brave simplicity of her confession. He was silent now until he could command his voice fully. "That is the Major and Hassan, of course; but I cannot make out the third figure," he said.

The men were drawing rapidly nearer, and now the Major raised his hat to Constance.

"So sorry to have kept you waiting," his kindly old voice ringing cheerily through the twilight; "but I bring news, Lawrence. You 're under marching orders again, my boy," bringing up his horse alongside of them. "Here, Mustapha, Selim — what the deuce is the fellow's name? Give us a look at that paper."

The third rider was Lawrence's own servant, the little Jew boy, muffled in an Arab cloak. He came up now at a canter, waving a letter above his head: "From my Lord Ahmed, O Howadji."

The young man glanced over the scrawl eagerly.

"Oh, it 's too late to read that now," the Major said;

"why you'd require an hour to figure out those hieroglyphics; but we've brought the gist of it with us, my boy. They are in a dreadful state of excitement about you down there at the hotel. You haven't a moment to lose, you know, for your caravan starts for Bagdad, or the Mountains of the Moon, or wherever else you are going, to-night. That's what you call short notice, eh, Constance? But it's nothing to what we were used to in the old army days."

The girl was looking down vacantly at the reins between her fingers. She gathered them tighter together now. "I think we had better ride fast to the hotel. Mr. Lawrence will be hurried," in a subdued, monotonous voice.

The Major laughed. "As practical as ever, Constance! But you are quite right."

"Come along, Lawrence; Constance is right — you haven't a moment to lose. And you'll see that I shall be the only one to say I mean to miss you," turning his horse's head about with his shrewd, good-humored laugh.

It was not twenty minutes' hard riding to the hotel-door. The courtyard was full of men when they entered. Old Ahmed had sent messenger after messenger, and there was a sudden chatter of excited voices, a sudden pressing forward of urgent hands as Lawrence dismounted from his horse. He put them all aside impatiently, helping Constance out of the saddle, and following her to the foot of the stairs without a word.

"I'm sorry, very sorry, to say good-by to you," he said simply.

It was growing dark in this walled-in place; one of the last comers had brought with him a lantern; the light flashed for an instant across the girl's white and rigid face, and then he could see nothing more but the silhouette of her figure relieving darkly against the wall.

"Come on, Lawrence! Look sharp about it, and I shall have time to ride round and see you fairly off before dinner."

She put out her hand with a sudden movement. "I hope you will be very happy, Mr. Lawrence. Good-by."

He bent down over her hand and kissed it, but I think she was hardly conscious of it at the time. She turned, and left him standing at the foot of the stair, and looking after her as she had left him once before, but with what a difference!

Mrs. Thayer was passing down the upper gallery. The girl stopped and spoke to her. "Yes, a very pleasant ride, thank you. Mr. Lawrence is going, Fanny, if you care to say good-by."

"What! going away?"

She looked back and nodded without speaking. The door of her room was standing open; she went in suddenly, and closed and locked this door behind her. Her room was in the front of the house; her window was still open as she had left it that morning; she could hear the sound of the men's voices, the clatter of hoofs upon the pavement below.

She crossed over slowly to where her small travelling-trunk had been thrown in one corner, bending over it, and opening it with a curious deliberation. She took out a small, sealed package and laid it upon the table, and then she lighted a candle, her gloved hands beginning to tremble a little, so that she had to strike three or four matches before she could get one to burn.

She tore off the paper covering and took out of it a journal. There were some loose papers, a sketch, a photograph lying upon it; but these she put carefully to one side, tearing out each leaf of the book methodically, and holding it over the flame until it curled and crumbled into ashes between her fingers. And, last of all, she took up the photograph. The fire charred and blackened it along the edges; she let it fall; she drew a long breath, leaning hard against the table, and then for the first time she lifted up her eyes and saw herself in the glass.

"After three years!"

She looked down at her hands, and began to pull off

the blackened gloves nervously. The room was full of smoke and the pungent smell of burning paper. She looked over at the window, through which the smoke was floating slowly out and melting into the quiet gray of the evening.

"After three years!" she repeated again slowly, looking down with a pitiful laugh at the dust of crumpled ashes on the floor. And then for a few minutes she ceased to think at all, standing there quite motionless long after the last red sparkle of fire had died away, and the last glimmer of light had sunk into ashes and dust.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE LAST LOOK BACK.

DURING the week which followed, Ferris saw a good deal of Miss Varley.

By his quiet attention he managed very often to keep her occupied — shielded from the questions and observations of her aunt; and in thinking of these sad old days of her youth, she has often had occasion to remember and be grateful for an unobtrusive kindness of which at the time she was hardly aware.

The Major, too, was very good to her. How much he understood or had guessed of her story, Constance never knew — she never cared to ask. She accepted whatever came to her in those days with a silent and well-nigh dogged endurance, which rarely looked beyond the matter in hand.

Mrs. Thayer may have noticed that she was a trifle thinner and paler and more quiet than usual. Mrs. Van Ness patted her upon the shoulder and spoke of Constantinople. "When your nice young friend, Mr. Stuart, returns from Baalbeck, my dear —" And both of them rejoiced in private over this most fortunate

turn of affairs, discussing the girl's possible disappointment placidly, with essentially feminine scepticism. And then they spoke eagerly of her probable establishment, and criticised the Stuart family at large, and were both of them as sincerely glad as they were both, in their different degrees, sincerely fond of Constance.

"If only Tom does not spoil it all with his foolishness!" Fanny sighed.

It was just a week after Lawrence's departure, and the Major had taken Constance out for a ride. They had gone again to Ahmed's garden.

When they reached the cross-roads the Major had proposed taking another direction.

"I should like to go back to where — to where we rode a few days ago," the girl answered steadily.

"As you please, my dear," turning about his horse's head with as much wonder over feminine perversity as could well be expected of a married man with a taste for philosophy.

And when they had reached the gate, he let her go in alone.

"I shall stay here and sketch," rubbing his short gray beard doubtfully. He called her back again as she was turning away. "Don't stay too long on the damp grass by that river, child. It 's unhealthy — low, marshy ground. The whole country seems designed for frogs or angels. It 's no place for human beings subject to rheumatism," fitting his palette leisurely across his strong, large hand.

But there was no smile on his vigilant face as he watched her pass quietly out of sight between the rose-bush hedges. He looked after her with a rough tenderness which would rather have astonished Fanny.

"Poor little girl!" he said, shaking his grizzled head thoughtfully. It is possible that his thoughts had wandered back to a time when he too was young and most miserable. "If she could only know for how short a time it makes a difference," he said, and fell to painting philosophically, — life being brief, and moist water-

colors a precarious possession at best in such a climate.

It was a sea-blue summer day. There was nothing about her but had undergone some change since the last time Constance had walked between these hedges. The ineffable hesitation of the spring-time had vanished. Every note of color was accentuated. The trees cast a deeper shadow across the path; the soft new grass was brilliant with new flowers; the reign of the blossoms was over, and in their place a thousand small green leaves were glistening in the sun. Already there was a new, full breath of opening roses upon the drier air.

It was only down by the river that nothing was altered, — neither the swift, smooth, abundant flowing of the water, nor the strong, thick growth of the water-plants, nor the bitter smell of beds of lily-leaves. She sat down under the same old poplar-tree; a ray of sunlight slipped between its branches, and the restless movement of the foliage kept a perpetual play of light leaf-shadows dancing about her hands and hair. She could not have told herself what motive had prompted her to revisit this place; only, through all the dreary days and nights through which she had been living, she had been haunted by a restless desire to come here once again; and now she drew a deep breath, and looked about her with the air of a person who has accomplished some purpose.

She leaned her face upon her hand and closed her eyes like one physically tired. And she was weary enough, poor child! weary of effort — of long and loyal and fruitless effort — and weary above all of idle questioning of fate. It might be easy now to see how all this could have been averted; but even now, when she thought of it, her silence towards Lawrence seemed to her to have been the one inevitable fact, the only thing she could have done, the one moment to which she looked back with a sort of despairing pride. For he had congratulated her upon her marriage with Stuart.

He had congratulated her! — closing her hands hard one upon the other, and looking down at them with a pitiful laugh.

And then for a moment all thought of self was swept away in one passionate revulsion of feeling, — in one wild desire to see him, to be with him, to speak to him again, to see him for one moment.

She did not cry, — these long years of repression, this life-long habit of self-control, stood her now in good stead; but she turned and pressed her cheek against the rough bark of the tree. He had leaned there beside her only a week ago. She put up her hand to her throat helplessly, her blue eyes growing dark and misty with a look of unutterable grief. It was the farewell of a loyal and patient heart, — dumb and faithful even unto death.

For Constance had made up her mind to marry Stuart.

If she had not been thrown into close personal relation with Denis Lawrence, it is possible — it is probable — that the devotion to this ideal might have sufficed for many years to fill her life. But, once brought near to him, the old barriers broken down, the girl's dream had changed into the passionate love of the woman. There was no return possible to the old condition of things. For she did love him. He had never, perhaps, been so inexpressibly dear to her as at that moment. There was not a look, not a familiar gesture, the turn of his head, the trick of his voice, which she did not remember and go over again and look at with a passion of hopeless pain, — with something, it may be, of the yearning anguish of a mother looking upon the dead face of her child. For it was not a common love this girl was losing; it was the loyal love of all her life, that had grown with her growth, the ideal of her existence; it was more than all this, it was her youth which Constance Varley buried that day.

And she did love him. Whatever any one else might think of Lawrence, he was to her still what he

had always been — always since the first day she had known him. Only then she had loved him and hoped, and now the hope was dead.

She looked down at the stream flowing by her in cool and beautiful and unreturning waves; and there came to her at that moment a sudden revelation of the awful futility of all experience, — the fatal passing away of youth and love, of sorrow and joy, to one common and swift and inevitable end. The sunshine shone upon the abundant water; a thrush was singing rapturously to its mate among the hawthorn bushes; the full-leafed summer trees waved in the warm, still air; the sky was of a deep and fleckless blue; there was not an object in all this beautiful world about her but rejoiced in the ample fruition of its life: and for the first time she felt herself an alien to it all, — a troubled human soul questioning, and unanswered, and alone.

She thought of Stuart; the possibility of making him the happier for her own existence had come to represent to her the only significance of her life. It was what Denis's mother would have done in her place, she thought; that woman, "who was so sad in her own life she spent it all in making others happy." And then as she repeated the words she could almost hear his voice saying them, and then again it seemed to her that she could not bear it. If she had ever cared in the least for Stuart, if she had ever felt the first spontaneous impulse of attraction towards him, she could never have decided to have married him then. But the thing came to her as a sacrifice; she herself had had one chance for happiness in life and lost it, and her first instinct was to put out her hand to give to another what she herself might never have.

For she had no illusions about that probable future. What life was coming to her she saw and understood, clearly and simply, with no mental reservations, with a despairing acceptance of duty and limitation alike.

To live, to comprehend the highest beauty, the profoundest significance of every passing moment; to know

the ecstasy of love ; to know the blessedness of possession, the rare blessedness of gift — this is success in life, and this is happiness. But to make of suffering the keynote to another's pain ; to learn from loneliness the pity for another's grief ; to merge all sorrow, all despair, in one wide brotherhood of understanding — surely, this too is success.

Success, but not happiness.

It is not happiness — but to the majority of human beings this absolute personal happiness will never come. We are young, and the world is ours to win : we are older, and the promise and the glory, " all those things are passed away like a shadow, and as a post that hasted by."

And in this brief life we all die many times — in friendship outgrown, in faith, in changed experience. Surely, they too may be called blessed to whom this death comes quickly, to whom past love remains ideal, hidden away safe from the touch of time and change, deep in some charmed and silent space of life.

But Constance was rather acting upon than thinking of these things. When, as she fancied, she had prepared herself to surrender all the old dreams, the old desires, she had not counted upon the influence of this place. It was here that she had come with Lawrence in the still, spring afternoon which already seemed so far, so very far away ; it was here — Her hand in passing over her dress had brushed against some faded blossoms still fastened in it from the other day's ride, and now the only thing left to her out of all the days that had been. She sat looking at them quietly enough for a moment, and then her proud lips began to tremble, she put her hands out with a passionate gesture. " Oh, my love ! " she said aloud, and the bitter tears rose slowly to her eyes, as she said it, — " oh, my dear love, I could have made you so happy if you had only let me ! "

And then through the murmurous silence of the summer day, she heard the quick tramp of a man's step coming towards her through the grass. And then, for

an instant, she leaned heavily against the tree, and her heart seemed beating up in her throat, and she felt her very lips grow cold.

It was Stuart who joined her there under the poplars. She knew it; she had known it all along; but she pressed her hand hard against her lip before she answered him; her voice seemed to have grown broken and beyond her control.

He came up rapidly and caught her hands in his. "Constance!"

It was not until long afterwards that he remembered that she had expressed no surprise at his sudden reappearance. "I — I have come back," he said breathlessly. "I couldn't stay away any longer. And they told me at the hotel that you were out here, and — It's a very nice place you've found here," without taking his eyes off her face.

"Yes," said Constance.

"I saw old Tom at the gate, you know. Baalbeck is a fine old place, for a ruin. I should think one could get a little shooting out there occasionally; we saw some partridges. Tom asked me to tell you that he was ready to go," with a nervous laugh.

"I am ready," she answered gravely. And neither of them moved.

The low sunlight shining in beneath the trees filled all the space about them with a reddish glow. He stood and looked at her a moment in silence — the woman he loved.

The young fellow's voice had grown unsteady with excitement as he repeated her name.

"Constance!"

She turned her head and waited.

"I saw Davenant at Baalbeck. He is going to Palmyra — "

"I know."

"He said — he told me — Lawrence has gone away, Constance."

She put her hand up to her throat suddenly. "Yes," in a sharp, unnatural tone. "He has gone."

He did not care for her manner. It was the fact, not the words, he wanted. He came close by her now. Her hand was hanging by her side; he took it in his and looked down at it, lying white and nerveless in his grasp. "I told you I should come back, and I am here, Constance," closing his fingers slowly over hers as he spoke.

She looked at him now. "I will tell you something. You are very good to me, Jack. I don't know why you should care for me. It is rather hard to understand this life" (with a little pitiful smile), "but at least one can be honest. You say that — Mr. Lawrence —" .

He put out his other hand quickly. "Don't speak to me of Mr. Lawrence, dear. You need not tell me. I don't want to know. We have all of us had our fancies for other people, I suppose," with blunt simplicity, a kind, sweet-tempered look coming into his clear, blue eyes. "I don't imagine you are different from other people. Heaven knows, I might not care to have to own up to all my own flirtations." He stopped abruptly and looked at her, the color rising slowly to his handsome face. "I'm not afraid of Lawrence or of Stuyvesant," with a delicious thrill of triumph, "or of any other man, if you say once that you will be my wife. I — You've got all my life in your hands, Constance, and for the rest I trust you."

There was a moment of profound silence, and then he saw her breast heave suddenly.

She stood up and turned her face away, and loosened her hands.

"I have the right to say that you *can* trust me — utterly," she said.

The red glow of the sunset was all about them now. He stood holding her hands and looking down at her with a kind of bewildered delight. Jealousy, except the immediate personal jealousy of a rival present in flesh and blood, was a passion absolutely unknown to Stuart; his nature was too objective for that. Where Lawrence would have driven himself mad with per-

sistent imaginings, he saw nothing but the facts — her presence.

"Constance!" repeating her name again and again. "Constance!" And she was to be his wife.

And then I think it was that poor Jack indulged in the one piece of sentiment of his life.

"Do you remember that day on Mount Gerizim? You were very unkind to me that day, dearest," bending down and kissing her hair. "I asked you to do a great many things for me that day, and you would not. You would not even give me the flowers you wore; do you remember? And now you will give me this," touching the faded peach-blossoms in her dress. "I want it as a sign — a promise."

She looked at him and then down at the flowers. "I cannot give you these, Jack," she took them out of her dress and held them in her hand; "they are dead."

"But I can get you some others in a minute," said Stuart eagerly. He swung himself lightly down the bank to where a belated cherry-tree spread its white boughs across the little river. The blossoms were over-blown, and fell and scattered at his touch. "I'll get them yet!" he called out gaily, trampling in amongst the river-reeds.

She held the faded blossoms in her hand and looked at them. It was all she had left. She crushed them against her lips with a sudden, passionate gesture, and then her face grew quite white; she stretched out her hand slowly and let the poor, dead flower fall into the stream. It caught for an instant among the grasses, and then the water seized it and swept it out of sight.

"And I have brought you back nothing but empty hands," said Stuart. "The blossoms are all faded. I might have known it before I went after them. The spring is over now."

He took her hand in his and led her away through the sunny garden. At first there was a trampled spot among the lily-leaves where their footsteps had pressed, but before long the freshness of the evening had lifted

up the grass; the wind had blown away the scattered blossoms by the river; the thrush was singing once more in wild, full-throated rapture — it was all as though they had never been.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

MIRAGE.

SOME two or three seasons have passed since then; but there are still a good many people in London who recollect the *furore* of admiration which raged for awhile in a certain artistic set the year Denis Lawrence brought back his pictures from the East. It is true that he had arrived there at a singularly fortunate moment, and when the critics were already beginning to inquire if there was nothing then in modern art between the production of pictures in every way adapted to the family circle and the work of a school, the chief of which was like Lazarus — one risen from the dead, and with the scent of the grave about him?

Lawrence had not been in town a month before his name became the signal for discussion in the studios. People went and looked at his large picture (the "Study of a Jewess"), and came away and shook their heads. And all the men of genius, who had ideas they did not know how to paint, said it was preposterous; and all the men of talent, who knew exactly how to paint the ideas they did not have, said it was rubbish. And then Mr. Lawrence sent his picture to the Academy.

It was accepted; it was hung on the line. And then more people went and looked at it; and at the dinner-parties, and between the entr'actes of the opera, all the young ladies asked their partners: "Who is this Mr. Lawrence?"

The answer varied. He came from New York, and had studied for years under Gerome, at Paris: you

found that out by looking at his drawing. He came from the South, and had been a Confederate General. He was immensely wealthy, and painted for his own amusement. He had not a penny to his name, poor devil! and had been sent over by a charitable association: "You know they do those things in America."

And this went on for about a week.

There happened to be at that time a young man writing for a certain influential journal, by the name of Challoner. He was an enthusiastic fellow, and very anxious to distinguish himself; and he had met Lawrence in Paris and travelled up to London with him by the Dover mail. And so he sat down and wrote a review of the Academy exhibition, in which he demonstrated to his own entire satisfaction that the "Jewess" was not only the most remarkable picture there, but one of the most remarkable pictures of modern times. Well, of course this made a great disturbance. There were other articles in other papers to prove that the "Jewess" was a daub, and counter articles on the opposite side to assert and maintain its pre-eminence.

And, in the midst of all this confusion, some one discovered that the picture was absolutely not for sale.

And so in this way people concluded they had met a new genius in the young artist — and an American genius, which made it even more wonderful. He had two reception-days in the week by this time; his brother artists advised him to go and study in Rome; he could have spent his life refusing "private views;" in a word, his success was complete.

One afternoon, late in the season, a party of three or four of us were standing before Lawrence's easel. It was the first time we had been thrown together, he and I, since the old Parisian days; I was struck by the change which had come over him since then. He seemed to me much older; not merely older in years, but in thought, in feeling, in aim — above all, in aim. He had become at once more positive and less serious in his way of looking at things. And there was some-

thing of sadness about him, too, as in every imaginative man who has taken his own measure, and learned by experience the limitation of his effort. He worked much harder, but he seemed to have less belief in his work; he was what the French call *détaché* from many things. "I have missed my chance somewhere," he said to me one day. "When was it? I cannot tell you, but something assures me that it is gone, and so — *Calypso s'est consolée du départ d'Ulysse*" (with a laugh); "*moi, je me console de la réalité.*"

Of course these are not entirely my first impressions, but I recollect that even that afternoon he seemed to me to have lost to an extraordinary degree the expectation of life. Lawrence and I are very old friends, and I confess I watched him then with some curiosity.

Challoner was there too, that afternoon, and he had brought some ladies with him. I was introduced to one of them, a Mrs. Sinclair; a very pretty woman, with large, brown eyes, with which she made incessant play while she was speaking.

"But of all the things you have shown us, Mr. Lawrence, I think I enjoy and covet that head the most," she said now with a graceful movement of her fine shoulders.

It was a portrait which Lawrence had just uncovered, and for a moment no one else spoke.

"You were thinking of the Mona Lisa in that background, I see," said Challoner after an interval of silence.

"It is wonderful, wonderful!" said Mrs. Sinclair, under her breath. She went nearer, and looked at it more steadily. "Mr. Lawrence, you read Browning, surely?"

"Why?" said Denis.

"Don't you remember it?" opening her beautiful eyes upon him suddenly; "why, that is the very expression Browning speaks of —

> ". . . only I discern
> Infinite passion and the pain
> Of finite hearts that yearn."

Mrs. Sinclair's voice was not the least of her attractions, and after this little bit of declamation it was felt that there was nothing more to say. Lawrence saw his visitors safely out of the door of the other studio and came back ; he found Challoner still standing before the portrait, looking at it with his head on one side, his hands in his pockets whistling softly to himself.

"I don't pretend to say you are always up to your own mark, Lawrence," he said argumentatively, "but when you do try for certain things, by Jove ! there isn't another man in London can touch you. This head, now. There 's a delicacy and a solidity in those flesh-tints ; there 's a strength and a sweetness in that modelling. Why, it 's enough to make an ordinary man's reputation as a portrait-painter. Finish it for the next R.A., like a good fellow, and won't I just give it a lift?"

"I can't. It 's a portrait taken without the permission of the original," said Lawrence. "I don't think it 's a bad thing myself. But the original was better."

He moved the picture round into a more favorable light, and then I, too, began to look at it. It was my first impression of a face which was destined to become very dear and very familiar to me later on, and perhaps some vague presentiment of the fact made me examine it with more than ordinary attention.

It was the life-size study of a girl's head. The face was slightly turned aside ; she was dressed in some dark, tightly-fitting garment, and the eyes and forehead were shaded by a broad-brimmed cavalier's hat. Perhaps no better idea of the impression it produced could be given than by the lines which Mrs. Sinclair had quoted ; for there was a singular suggestion of sadness about the grave, sweet eyes and on the small, close mouth, — a suggestion very happily carried out in the sentiment of the background. Only the face could be said to be finished. Behind it was a slight indication of pale, luminous sky, a low horizon, a gleaming line of some strange water. The whole picture was full of this curious reflected light. The hands and the lower part of the figure were roughly

blocked out, and it was characteristic of Denis that he had left the lower part of his canvas still uncovered.

"There is something curious about that sketch," he said now, looking at it meditatively. "There are days when I hate it, and have to turn it to the wall not to run my palette-knife through it. There are days when it stares at me like a material reproach, the visible sign of my falling off."

He took a turn up and down the studio. "Talk about knowledge and all that sort of stuff," he began again, stopping in front of the picture, "why, there is more in that head — more expressed, not worked out, mind you — than I can reach again by studying twenty years for it. The thing is an accident, the mere expression of an influence," he said moodily; "it isn't a measure of my work."

"But, my dear boy, all you have got to do is to fall in love with your next model, if you can only paint by inspiration and all that sort of thing," said Challoner.

I happened to be looking at Denis, and I saw him change color at the speech.

"Confound your falling in love!" he said hastily; "you don't suppose I was ever in love with that girl, do you?" He bent down and looked more closely at the portrait "She is married now," he said. "It 's three years or more since that head was painted, and full two years since I saw the notice of her wedding in an old newspaper. I remember I was at Bagdad at the time."

The girl's face interested me, and I asked who it was she had married.

"A man by the name of Stuart. A good sort of fellow, too; but with about as many brains as your little finger, and rather less imagination. From something she told me one day — the very day I got the hint for that portrait, by-the-way — I imagine she had been in love with him for some time — for several years,

in fact. I suppose she thought him handsome — and so he was; but a man of that calibre can only be interesting while he is desperately in love. In the ordinary wear and tear of life — Ah, well! 'Allah is great, no doubt, and Juxtaposition his prophet!'"

"Well, I don't know. I should not have thought that girl would have made that kind of mistake," said Challoner thoughtfully. "Why," looking up from his cigar with a yawn, "why, she would have done better to have taken a fancy to you, Lawrence."

"Ah, well! but then you see she never did," lightly. "But I think," said Lawrence, with sudden seriousness, "I think she had one of the noblest natures it has ever been my privilege to meet."

We spoke of something else after that; Lawrence wanted me to go and dine with him at his club, I remember.

"I won't promise you any thing particularly wonderful in the way of a dinner; they are getting deuced careless with their cooking of late: but old Ferris will be there," he said, "and another man I want you to meet — a capital fellow I knew in the East. I know you will like him — a man by the name of Davenant."

It was only as we were all going out of the studio together that Challoner spoke of the picture again.

"You can say what you like, Lawrence, but, by Jove! I stick to my own opinion," he said doggedly, stopping to take a last look at the portrait of Constance. "I'll bet you a hundred pounds that such a face was never intended to belong to a woman without a name and a history!"

"Then you would lose your money, my dear fellow, let me tell you," Lawrence answered carelessly. "As for the name, if I ever decide to finish it, I shall call it 'Mirage;' but it is a face without a history."

The door shut noisily behind them, filling the empty old house with a hollow, echoing sound. And then the

room grew very quiet. For a little while the pale afternoon light made a glimmering space about the window, the color slowly fading out of picture and carpet and stuff. It lingered for a moment more on the sad, sweet face of Constance, and then that too faded away into the deepening night.

NO NAME SERIES.

FROM THE "LIBRARY TABLE."

An Extract from a Review of the "No Name Series."

"That novel-readers are yearly growing more appreciative, more critical, is an acknowledged fact; and it is a question deserving of some consideration, whether the tendency of certain publishing firms to embody all the works of fiction issued by them in one or more series, — that is, in similar size and binding, with some attractive general title, — is not a movement having for its root an increasing and more dainty appetite for the best light literature. Of course, the desire of publishers to reduce to a minimum the cost of production must be taken into consideration. . . . In these pretty, uniform volumes, this end is attained; while the artistic designs of the cover, and the similarity of size and color, which, though objectionable to the epicurean bibliophile, is apt to appeal pleasurably to the taste of the many, are, or should be in themselves, guarantees that the contents must be above the average to be worthy of a *début* in so dainty a form.

"One of the most consistent and appreciative efforts in this line is the 'No Name Series' of Messrs. Roberts Brothers; consistent, because the tacit agreement that each issue should be of the best literary merit has, in this instance, and thus far, been faithfully adhered to; it is not as yet numerically strong; it numbers but eight volumes, but among the eight there is not one that has not deserved and received its meed of praise. And that there has not been lacking among them sufficient variety of style and diversity of talent, the three volumes which have served to give subject to this article ('A Modern Mephistopheles,' 'Afterglow,' 'Hetty's Strange History'), and which are the latest issues of this series, will sufficiently attest: three novels more dissimilar in method and in treatment it would be difficult to cite."

FOR A LIST OF THE "NO NAME SERIES," SEE NEXT PAGE.

THE "NO NAME SERIES."

A MODERN MEPHISTOPHELES.

"It is decidedly the best novel of the series, thus far. . . . The leading idea of 'A Modern Mephistopheles' is ingenious. The characters are skilfully chosen to represent it: the one secret in the story is beyond the guessing of most readers, and admirably concealed until the true moment for its disclosure; and the *dénouement* is as satisfactory as we could expect. Helwyze, like Goethe's Mephistopheles, wills the bad and works the good: the justice of Fate falls upon him, and not upon his victim. But this is the only point of resemblance. Gladys, although occupying the place of Margaret, is an entirely different creature, and it is the best success of the author's art that she is more real to us than the other three characters. The work belongs to the class of imaginative fiction which claims its right to dispense with probability or even strict dramatic consistency. It cannot be measured by the standard which we apply to novels of society or of ordinary human interests, but rather by that which belongs to poetry." — *New York Tribune.*

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